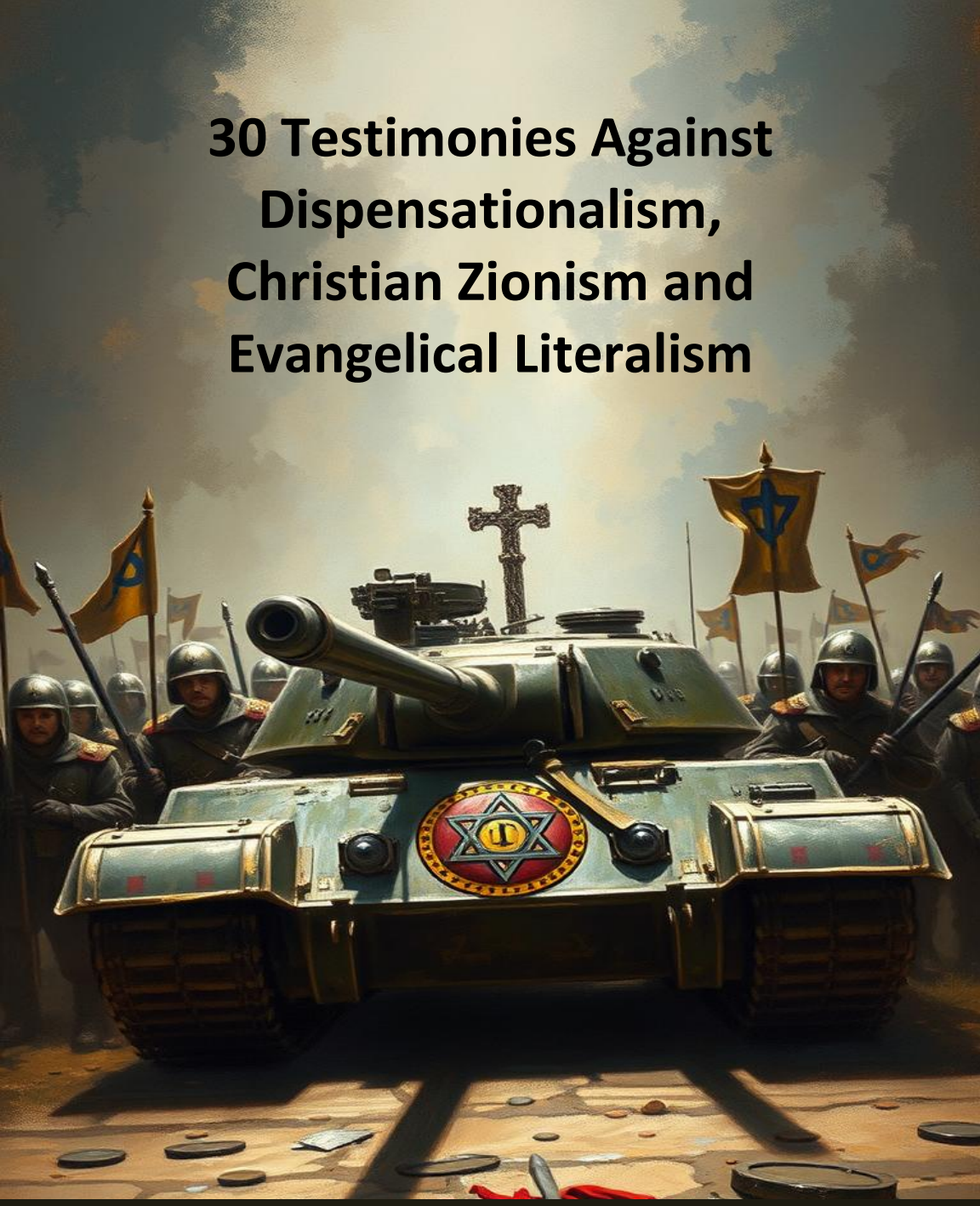
30 Testimonies Against Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism and Evangelical Literalism



Mohammad Mandurah

30 Testimonies Against Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism and Evangelical Literalism

Mohammad Mandurah

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In the Name of Allah,
The Most Merciful,
The Most Compassionate

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Preface

This book was born out of anguish and hope.

The anguish is real and immediate. As these words are written, the land called holy by Jews, Christians, and Muslims is once again ravaged by war. Gaza, a place where ancient faiths have mingled for centuries, is now a symbol of suffering—its streets filled with grief, its people longing for justice and peace, its children bearing wounds that may never fully heal. The images and stories reach far beyond borders, stirring the hearts of all who claim to follow the Prince of Peace. Each day brings new reports of loss and devastation, and with them, the urgent question: what does it mean to be a Christian in such a time as this?

Yet the hope that animates this project is equally profound. It is the hope that, even in the midst of violence and division, the Church can rediscover its true calling: to be a community of reconciliation, truth, and compassion. It is the hope that Christians will find the courage to question inherited assumptions, to listen to voices long ignored, and to seek the heart of the gospel in the midst of crisis. It is the hope that, by returning to the teachings of Jesus and the wisdom of the early Church, we might find a path toward healing—not only for the people of the Holy Land, but for ourselves and our communities as well.

For too long, much of Western Christianity has been shaped by theological movements—Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and Evangelical Literalism—that have profoundly influenced how believers interpret the Bible, understand the people and land of Israel, and engage with the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. These movements, while often presented as timeless truths, are in fact recent innovations. They have led many to read Scripture as a blueprint for geopolitics, to divide God's people along ethnic and national lines, and, at times, to sanctify violence in the name of prophecy. The consequences of these beliefs are not merely theoretical; they have impacted real lives, shaped international policies, and, tragically, have often contributed to the suffering of those whom Jesus called "*the least of these*."

This book is a response to that legacy. It brings together thirty testimonies from scholars, pastors, historians, and activists—women and men whose integrity, learning, and courage have helped the Church to see more clearly. Their voices, drawn from different eras and traditions, form a chorus of critique and invitation. Some have paid a high price for their convictions: ostracism, professional loss, or public censure. Yet their commitment to truth and justice has endured, and their work continues to inspire a growing movement of Christians who refuse to accept easy answers or inherited dogmas without question.

The testimonies in these pages do not merely expose the flaws and dangers of popular theologies. More importantly, they point the way to a deeper, more faithful vision: one rooted in the teachings of Jesus, the witness of the early Church, and the call to justice and mercy. They remind us that the Bible is not a weapon to be wielded in service of ideology, but a living word that calls us to love God and neighbor, to seek peace and pursue it, and to stand with the oppressed and marginalized.

The journey through these pages is not always comfortable. It asks hard questions about cherished beliefs, about complicity in injustice, and about the cost of discipleship. It challenges us to move beyond simplistic answers and to embrace the complexity—and the beauty—of the biblical story. It invites us to wrestle with difficult texts, to listen to voices from the margins, and to open our hearts to the possibility that God is still speaking, still calling the Church to repentance and renewal.

Above all, this book is an invitation to action. The suffering in Gaza, the divisions in the Church, and the misuse of Scripture demand more than intellectual assent or private piety. They call us to stand with the vulnerable, to speak truth in love, and to become peacemakers in a world desperately in need of peace. They call us to examine our own lives and communities, to ask where we have been silent or complicit, and to commit ourselves anew to the radical way of Jesus.

As you read, I invite you to approach these pages with an open mind and a willing heart. Allow yourself to be challenged, to be unsettled, and, ultimately, to be transformed. May this book serve as a catalyst for repentance, renewal, and faithful witness. May it help us, in this dark hour, to remember the words of Jesus:

"*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God*."

With gratitude to the contributors, and with prayer for all who read,

The Editor

Mohammad M. Mandurah
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
2025

Introduction

1. The Urgency of the Moment

As these pages are written, the world's attention is fixed on Gaza, where the devastation of war has reached unbearable proportions. The cries of the wounded, the bereaved, and the dispossessed echo across continents. The world watches as ancient cities are reduced to rubble, families are torn apart, and the innocent—often children—bear the brunt of violence that seems unending.

For Christians, the conflict is not a distant tragedy. It unfolds in the land of the Bible, the birthplace of Jesus, and the cradle of our faith. Yet, for many in the church, particularly in the West, the lens through which we view these events is not merely humanitarian or political, but profoundly theological. Generations have been shaped by teachings that claim to find in the Bible a divine blueprint for modern Middle Eastern politics. These teachings have fueled expectations, shaped alliances, and, too often, have muted the church's prophetic voice for peace and justice.

In this context, the stakes are high. The war in Gaza is not only a humanitarian disaster but a theological crisis. It exposes the consequences of doctrines and interpretations that, while popular and widespread, are far removed from the heart of Christianity. This book is offered as a response to that crisis—a call to return to the roots of our faith, to examine the foundations of our beliefs, and to rediscover the gospel of Jesus as good news for all people, especially the suffering.

2. Objectives of the Book

This book is not just another academic treatise; it is a summons to the church and to all who seek truth. Its objectives are fourfold:

- **To Illuminate the Historical and Theological Landscape:** The book traces the rise of Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and Evangelical Literalism, showing how these movements departed from the historic consensus of the church. It explores how 19th-century anxieties, political ambitions, and interpretive innovations combined to produce doctrines that now dominate much of evangelical thought.
- **To Challenge Misreadings of Scripture:** Through the voices of thirty distinguished scholars, the book demonstrates that a literalist, predictive, and nationalistic reading of the Bible distorts its message and undermines its power. The testimonies reveal a richer, more faithful way to approach

Scripture—one that honors its literary diversity, historical context, and Christ-centered focus.

- **To Expose the Real-World Consequences:** The book does not shy away from the impact of these theologies. It documents how they have influenced foreign policy, stoked division, and, most painfully, contributed to the suffering of Palestinian Christians and Muslims. It asks hard questions about complicity, silence, and the responsibilities of faith in the face of injustice.
- **To Offer a Path Forward:** Finally, the book points to a better way—a return to the teachings of Jesus, the wisdom of the early church, and a vision of the kingdom of God that transcends ethnic, political, and national boundaries. It calls Christians to be peacemakers, truth-tellers, and advocates for justice, not passive spectators or cheerleaders for war.

This is a book for our time: a time of conflict, confusion, and opportunity. It is a call to repentance and renewal, to courage and compassion.

3. About the Testimonies

The thirty testimonies presented in this volume are each drawn from published books or articles by prominent scholars, pastors, and theologians. They are organized in chronological order, according to the dates of their original publication. This structure allows readers to trace the development of theological critique across generations and to see how concerns about biblical interpretation, authority, and ethics have evolved over time.

Importantly, the earlier testimonies—those appearing before Dispensationalism and Evangelical Literalism became established movements—were directed primarily against the doctrine of inerrancy and the principle of literalism. These foundational beliefs would later become the bedrock of the new movements critiqued in this book. By challenging inerrancy and literalism from the outset, these early voices laid the groundwork for later critiques of Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism, demonstrating that the roots of the debate reach deeper than recent controversies alone.

4. The Credibility of the Voices

The authority of this book rests on the caliber and integrity of its contributors. The thirty testimonies gathered here represent the best of Christian scholarship and pastoral wisdom. These are not marginal figures or iconoclasts, but respected leaders whose work has shaped the church's understanding of Scripture and mission.

- **Bishop John William Colenso** risked his career and reputation to bring intellectual honesty to biblical interpretation, insisting that faith and reason must walk together.
- **Charles Augustus Briggs** endured censure and exile for advocating a critical, historically informed approach to the Bible, paving the way for generations of faithful scholarship.
- **Philip Mauro, Benjamin Warfield, Louis Berkhof, William Hendriksen, and Oswald Allis**—pillars of Reformed theology—offered rigorous critiques of Dispensationalism, exposing its novelty and lack of biblical foundation.
- **George Eldon Ladd, R.C. Sproul, Gary DeMar**—leading voices in eschatology—challenged the sensationalism of rapture theology, offering hope rooted in Christ's victory and the ongoing mission of the church.
- **Bart Ehrman, Peter Enns, Richard Friedman**—world-renowned scholars—have illuminated the complexity, humanity, and spiritual depth of Scripture, inviting believers to a more mature and robust faith.
- **Stephen Sizer, Donald Wagner, and N.T. Wright**—pastors, activists, and theologians—have stood in solidarity with the oppressed, calling the church to repentance, justice, and reconciliation in the Holy Land.

Many of these witnesses have paid a price for their convictions—facing criticism, exclusion, or even persecution. Yet their voices endure, grounded in scholarship, pastoral care, and a deep love for the church and the world. Their testimonies are a gift and a challenge to every reader.

5. An Invitation to the Reader

This book is an invitation—one that is both personal and communal. It invites you, the reader, to enter into a conversation that is as old as the church and as urgent as today's headlines. It asks you to listen deeply, to question courageously, and to discern faithfully.

Whether you are a pastor, a student, a layperson, or a seeker, you are welcome here. You may come with convictions, doubts, or questions. You may feel anger, grief, or confusion about the suffering in Gaza and the church's response. This book does not offer easy answers or quick fixes. Instead, it offers the wisdom of those who have wrestled with the hardest questions and found, in the struggle, a deeper faith.

You are invited to:

- **Listen** to voices that challenge the status quo, even when it is uncomfortable.
- **Examine** the roots of your own beliefs, and ask whether they align with the teachings of Jesus and the witness of the early church.
- **Engage** Scripture with humility and openness, trusting that God's truth can withstand our questions.
- **Commit** yourself to the work of peace, justice, and reconciliation, especially in places of conflict and pain.

6. The Journey Ahead

As you turn the pages of this book, you will encounter stories of courage, scholarship, and costly discipleship. You will meet women and men who have risked much to speak truth to power, to defend the oppressed, and to call the church back to its first love. Their testimonies are not the final word, but an invitation to continue the journey—toward a faith that is intellectually honest, spiritually vibrant, and morally courageous.

- ❖ May this book equip you to see the world—and the Scriptures—through new eyes.
- ❖ May it inspire you to seek the peace of Christ in a world at war.
- ❖ May it strengthen your resolve to follow Jesus, wherever he leads.

Welcome to this journey of faith, hope, and love.

Testimony #1: Colenso – The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined (1862).

The Author: **John William Colenso** (1814-1883). He was a Cornish mathematician, defender of the Zulu and biblical scholar, who was the first Church of England Bishop of Natal.[1]

The Book: ***"The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined."*** [2] The book is a seminal work in the history of biblical criticism. Published in several volumes between 1862 and 1879, Colenso's meticulous analysis of the first six books of the Bible sparked intense debate within religious and academic circles. His approach was revolutionary for its time: he applied mathematical reasoning, historical scrutiny, and logical analysis to the sacred texts, exposing errors, contradictions, and inconsistencies that had long been overlooked or rationalized by traditional interpreters.

Core Themes and Arguments

A. The Critical Examination

1. Critical Inquiry and the Challenge to Tradition: Colenso's primary theme is the necessity of honest, rational inquiry into the Bible. He believed that faith should not be divorced from reason, and that the pursuit of truth, even if it leads to uncomfortable conclusions, is a sacred duty. Colenso was motivated by pastoral concerns, as he encountered doubts and questions from his parishioners—especially in South Africa, where he served as Bishop of Natal—and sought to address these with intellectual integrity.

2. Exposure of Errors, Contradictions, and Inconsistencies: Colenso's work is distinguished by its rigorous attention to detail. He systematically examines the biblical

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Colenso

[2] Colenso, John W. *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined, Parts: I, II, III, IV & V*. Longman Roberts & Green, London, Published between 1862 and 1879.

texts, highlighting numerous instances where the narrative fails to withstand scrutiny. Some of the most striking examples include:

a. Numerical Improbabilities

- **The Census of Israel:** In Exodus 12:37, it is claimed that 600,000 men (not counting women and children) left Egypt during the Exodus. Colenso calculates that, including women and children, the total population would be upwards of two to three million. He points out the logistical impossibility of such a vast multitude surviving in the Sinai wilderness, given the described resources—food, water, and shelter. He further notes that the land area of Goshen, where the Israelites supposedly lived in Egypt, could not have supported such a large population.
- **Levite and Firstborn Numbers:** Numbers 3:39 states there were 22,000 Levite males, while Numbers 3:43 records 22,273 firstborn males among the Israelites. Colenso observes that this would mean, on average, less than one firstborn male per family, which is statistically improbable given the population size and family structures described.
- **Sacrificial Demands:** The Pentateuch describes daily sacrifices and offerings that, over forty years, would require millions of animals. Colenso calculates the impossibility of maintaining such numbers of livestock in the desert, and the impracticality of the rituals as described.

b. Logistical and Chronological Contradictions:

- **The Crossing of the Red Sea:** Colenso questions how millions of people, with their possessions and livestock, could cross the Red Sea in a single night, as described in Exodus 14. He also notes the lack of archaeological evidence for such a massive migration.
- **Encampments and Movements:** The narrative describes the Israelites camping at Sinai and other locations, but the logistics—setting up, breaking camp, and moving such a large group—are never addressed. Colenso calculates the time and resources required, finding them implausible.
- **Genealogical Timelines:** In Exodus 6, the genealogy from Levi to Moses covers only a few generations, yet the narrative implies a span of hundreds of years. Colenso points out the inconsistency between the genealogical data and the historical timeline.

c. Internal Contradictions and Anachronisms:

- **Conflicting Accounts:** Colenso highlights discrepancies in the numbers of Israelites reported in different books, such as the census figures in Numbers compared to those in other texts.
- **Anachronistic References:** The Pentateuch and Joshua mention places and peoples (such as the Philistines) who did not exist in the region at the time the narrative is set, suggesting later editorial additions.
- **Miraculous Events**: Colenso is skeptical of certain miracles, such as manna falling from heaven or water springing from rocks, not simply on theological grounds but because of the lack of corroborating evidence and the implausibility of the events as described.

d. Theological Implications:

- Colenso's analysis is not simply an exercise in skepticism; he is deeply concerned with the theological consequences of error and contradiction. He argues that a faith built on demonstrable falsehoods is ultimately unstable, and that true religious conviction must be informed by reason and evidence.

B. Impact on the Doctrine of Inerrancy and Infallibility

- **Challenge to Inerrancy:** The doctrine of biblical inerrancy asserts that the scriptures are without error in all their teachings, including matters of history and science. Colenso's detailed exposition of factual, numerical, and historical errors directly undermines this claim. By showing that the Bible contains demonstrable mistakes and contradictions, Colenso forces a reconsideration of what it means for scripture to be "inspired" or "authoritative."
- **Shift in Understanding:** Colenso's work contributed to a shift in how many theologians and scholars understood the nature of biblical inspiration. Rather than viewing the Bible as a flawless record, they began to see it as a collection of texts shaped by human authors, editors, and historical circumstances. This paved the way for the development of modern biblical criticism, which seeks to understand the Bible in its historical and literary context.
- **Pastoral and Ecclesiastical Consequences:** Colenso's findings provoked controversy and backlash, especially from those committed to traditional views of scripture. His work led to debates within the Anglican Church and beyond, forcing religious leaders to grapple with the implications of error in the sacred texts. Some doubled down on inerrancy, while others adopted

more nuanced positions, emphasizing the spiritual rather than the literal truth of scripture.

C. Impact on Dispensationalism

- **Foundational Tenets of Dispensationalism:** Dispensationalism divides history into distinct periods or "dispensations," each marked by a particular relationship between God and humanity. This framework relies heavily on a literal reading of biblical history and prophecy, especially the accounts of Israel's origins, wanderings, and settlement in the Promised Land.
- **Colenso's Challenge:** By exposing the historical and numerical problems in the Pentateuch and Joshua, Colenso undermines the literal foundation upon which dispensationalism is built. If the events described are not historically reliable, then the dispensationalist timeline—especially the sequence of covenants and promises—becomes suspect. This forces dispensationalists to reconsider the basis of their interpretive system, potentially shifting toward more symbolic or theological readings of scripture.
- **Long-Term Effects**: While dispensationalism remains influential in some Christian circles, Colenso's work contributed to a broader movement toward critical scholarship and away from rigid literalism. Many theologians now recognize the importance of literary genre, historical context, and editorial development in interpreting biblical texts.

D. Impact on Christian Zionism

- **Foundational Tenets of Christian Zionism:** Christian Zionism interprets the biblical promises to Israel as literal prophecies about the modern Jewish people and the state of Israel. These beliefs are rooted in a direct, uncritical reading of the Old Testament narratives and promises.
- **Colenso's Critique:** Colenso's demonstration of inconsistencies and historical problems in the accounts of Israel's origins and conquest of Canaan undermines the theological basis for Christian Zionism. If the biblical narratives are not reliable historical records, then the justification for linking ancient promises to modern political realities is weakened. This invites reinterpretation of the promises as spiritual or symbolic rather than literal and geopolitical.
- **Contemporary Relevance:** Colenso's work remains relevant in debates over the relationship between religion and politics, especially in contexts where biblical texts are used to justify contemporary claims. His insistence on critical

inquiry challenges simplistic readings and encourages a more nuanced engagement with scripture.

E. Impact on Evangelical Literalism

- **Foundational Tenets of Evangelical Literalism:** Evangelical literalism maintains that the Bible should be read as literally true, especially regarding history, miracles, and prophecy. This approach is central to many evangelical beliefs and practices.
- **Colenso's Challenge:** Colenso's exposure of errors and contradictions makes a strictly literal reading untenable. He shows that such an approach leads to absurdities and impossibilities, and that a more sophisticated hermeneutic is required. Evangelicals faced with Colenso's arguments must either reject his findings, reinterpret the texts, or revise their understanding of biblical authority.
- **Broader Implications:** Colenso's work contributed to a movement within evangelicalism toward greater engagement with scholarship, history, and literary analysis. While literalism remains influential, many evangelicals now recognize the value of critical inquiry and the importance of context in interpreting scripture.

Conclusion

John Colenso's The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined represents a watershed in the history of biblical scholarship. By subjecting the foundational texts of the Bible to rigorous analysis, Colenso exposed errors, contradictions, and inconsistencies that challenged traditional doctrines and interpretive frameworks. His work forced theologians, clergy, and laypeople alike to grapple with the implications of fallibility in scripture, leading to profound shifts in the understanding of biblical authority, history, and interpretation.

Colenso's legacy is not one of skepticism for its own sake, but of intellectual integrity and the pursuit of truth. He believed that faith should be informed by reason, and that honest inquiry is essential to genuine religious conviction. His work continues to inspire scholars and believers to engage with scripture critically, thoughtfully, and humbly, seeking not only answers but also deeper understanding.

In the end, Colenso's critical examination of the Pentateuch and Joshua opened new horizons for biblical study, challenged the dogmas of inerrancy, dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and evangelical literalism, and helped pave the way for a more

honest and robust engagement with the sacred texts at the heart of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Testimony #2: Briggs – The Authority of Holy Scripture (1891).

The Author: **Charles Augustu Briggs** (1841-1913) was an American Presbyterian (and later Episcopalian) scholar and theologian. He was excommunicated from the Presbyterian Church for heresy due to his liberal theology regarding the Bible. After his condemnation by the Presbyterians, he turned towards Episcopalianism and was ordained as a priest of the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1899. His scholarship procured for him the honorary degree of D.D. from the University of Edinburgh (1884) and from the University of Glasgow (1901), and that of D.Litt., from the University of Oxford (1901).[3]

The Book: "***The Authority of Holy Scripture."***[4] This book contains Charles Briggs' inaugural address delivered at Union Theological Seminary in New York on January 20, 1891, upon his appointment to the Edward Robinson Chair of Biblical Theology. The address, which generated significant controversy and public debate, includes a preface, appendix, charges of heresy, and Briggs' response before the Presbytery of New York. The work explores the nature and authority of Holy Scripture, the relationship between Scripture, Church, and Reason, and the evolution of Biblical Theology in the context of modern criticism and ecclesiastical tradition.

Core Topics and Ideas

Briggs' "*The Authority of Holy Scripture*" is a landmark address advocating for a critical, historical, and theological approach to Scripture, urging the Church to move beyond dogmatic barriers and embrace the Bible's essential teachings. The analysis below concentrates on Briggs' critique of the Inerrancy/Infallibility of the Bible doctrine and its implications on the foundational tenets of Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and Evangelical Literalism.

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[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Augustus_Briggs

[4] Briggs, Charles A. *The Authority of Holy Scripture*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891.

1. Briggs' Critique of Biblical Inerrancy/Infallibility

A. Core Arguments

i. **Textual Criticism and the Reality of Errors:** Briggs begins by confronting the empirical reality revealed by textual criticism: the Bible, as it exists in its manuscript tradition, contains numerous discrepancies, variant readings, and apparent errors. He points out that the original manuscripts ("autographs") are lost to history, and thus any claim that only the originals were inerrant is impossible to verify or sustain. This makes the doctrine of inerrancy not only impractical but also speculative, since it rests on documents we do not possess.

ii. **Lack of Scriptural or Confessional Support:** Briggs asserts that neither the Bible itself nor the foundational creeds and confessions of the church, such as the Westminster Confession, require belief in total inerrancy. The traditional formula is that the Scriptures are "the only infallible rule of faith and practice," focusing on their spiritual and moral authority, not on their scientific or historical precision. He emphasizes that attempts to read more into the confessions are unwarranted innovations.

iii. **Distinction Between Essentials and Circumstantial:** A critical move in Briggs' argument is his distinction between essentials (the core messages of faith, doctrine, and morals) and circumstantial (historical details, scientific descriptions, and textual minutiae). He contends that the authority and inspiration of Scripture are not compromised by errors in circumstantial matters. What matters is the Bible's role in conveying God's redemptive message, not its perfection in every peripheral detail.

iv. **Historical Precedent Among Reformers and Theologians:** Briggs reminds his audience that the great Protestant reformers and many subsequent theologians recognized the presence of errors or discrepancies in Scripture and were not troubled by them. Figures like Luther and Calvin, as well as later thinkers, maintained their confidence in the Bible's spiritual authority without insisting on its absolute factual inerrancy.

v. **Inerrancy as a Modern Evangelical Construct:** He argues that the obsession with inerrancy is a relatively modern development, particularly within American evangelicalism. This fixation, he claims, has become a stumbling block, creating unnecessary barriers to faith and intellectual honesty, and driving many away from the church or from serious engagement with the Bible.

B. Representative Statements

Briggs argues that there are errors in the Scriptures that no one has been able to explain away, and that the theory that such errors were not present in the original manuscripts is sheer assumption. He insists that the doctrine of inspiration, as stated in historic creeds, remains intact even if circumstantial errors are admitted, so long as the essential matters of faith and salvation are not compromised.

2. Implications for Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and Evangelical Literalism

Briggs' arguments have profound implications for several influential streams of modern Protestant thought, all of which rest heavily on the premise of an inerrant and literally interpreted Bible.

A. Dispensationalism

- **Nature of Dispensationalism:** Dispensationalism divides biblical history into distinct periods or "dispensations," each governed by specific divine covenants and promises. It relies on a strictly literal reading of biblical chronology and prophecy, particularly in the books of Daniel, Revelation, and other apocalyptic texts.
- **Threat from Briggs' Critique:** Briggs' rejection of inerrancy undermines the very foundation of dispensationalism. If the Bible contains errors or if its prophecies are not always fulfilled in a literal, detailed manner, then the carefully constructed timelines and systems of dispensationalism become unreliable. Furthermore, Briggs' argument that not all prophecies are fulfilled literally, and that some are even reversed or reinterpreted in light of later revelation, destabilizes the entire dispensational framework.

B. Christian Zionism

- **Nature of Christian Zionism:** Christian Zionism is rooted in the conviction that biblical promises regarding the land of Israel must be fulfilled literally in the modern era. It finds theological justification for political and religious support for the State of Israel in a literal reading of Old Testament land promises and prophecies.
- **Threat from Briggs' Critique:** Briggs' approach, which allows for non-literal, historical, and theological readings of prophecy, directly challenges the foundation of Christian Zionist theology. If biblical land promises are not inerrant blueprints for contemporary geopolitics, but rather part of a broader theological narrative, then the rationale for Christian Zionism is called into question. Briggs' historical-critical method opens up the possibility that these texts were contextually bound, fulfilled in different ways, or meant symbolically.

C. Evangelical Literalism

- **Nature of Evangelical Literalism:** Evangelical literalism insists that every statement in the Bible—whether historical, scientific, or moral—is to be understood as literally true and without error. This approach resists allegorical or critical readings and often sets up a direct confrontation with modern science and historiography.
- **Threat from Briggs' Critique:** By acknowledging errors and calling for a distinction between essentials and circumstantial, Briggs undermines the literalist hermeneutic. His approach encourages readers to engage with the Bible's genres, historical context, and theological intentions, rather than demanding that every detail be factually accurate. This shift allows for a more nuanced and dynamic engagement with Scripture, but it also removes the certainty and simplicity that literalism promises.

3. Theological and Practical Outcomes

- **Encouragement of Critical and Honest Engagement:** Briggs' position liberates believers from the burden of defending the indefensible—namely, the claim that the Bible is perfect in every respect. This honesty allows for a more authentic relationship with Scripture, where difficult questions can be faced without fear of undermining faith.
- **Focus on Essentials:** By shifting the emphasis to the central teachings of the Bible—God's redemptive work, the person of Christ, the call to faith and moral living—Briggs enables Christians to find unity around what truly matters, rather than being divided over peripheral issues.
- **Openness to Ecumenical and Scholarly Dialogue:** Briggs' approach makes room for dialogue with other Christian traditions and with modern scholarship. Rather than retreating into defensive dogmatism, his method encourages learning from history, science, and other disciplines, enriching rather than threatening faith.

Conclusion

Briggs' arguments against inerrancy and infallibility are not an attack on the authority of Scripture, but an invitation to a more mature, historically informed, and spiritually centered engagement with the Bible. By dismantling the rigid scaffolding of dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and evangelical literalism, he calls Christians to rediscover the Bible's power as the living Word of God—a guide to faith, hope, and

love—rather than as a flawless textbook of facts and predictions. This approach opens the door to a more robust, honest, and transformative Christian faith.

Testimony #3: Mauro – The Hope of Israel: What Is It? (1929)

The Author: Philip Mauro (1859–1952) was an American lawyer, author, and Christian thinker known for his influential writings on biblical interpretation and prophecy. After a successful legal career—including arguing cases before the U.S. Supreme Court—Mauro became a prolific Christian writer, penning works that challenged popular theological trends such as dispensationalism.[5]

The Book: " ***The Hope of Israel: What Is It?*** "[6] The book is a critical examination of the doctrine, prevalent in both first-century Judaism and segments of twentieth-century Christianity, that the central hope for Israel is the restoration of national, political, and earthly glory. Mauro challenges this view, arguing that such an expectation is a "Jewish fable" that distorts the true biblical hope, which is spiritual and fulfilled in Christ, not in a future earthly kingdom for the Jewish nation. The book is written to encourage Christians to search the Scriptures and reconsider the nature of Israel's hope in light of the New Testament revelation.

Topics and Core Ideas

1. The Nature and Importance of the Question

Philip Mauro emphasizes that the question of "the hope of Israel" is not a mere academic or theological curiosity—it is central to the understanding of the entire Christian message. He argues that the way Christians interpret the promises made to Israel has profound implications for the gospel, for the unity of the church, and for the mission to both Jews and Gentiles. Mauro warns that a mistaken view—particularly the belief in a future, earthly restoration of Israel as a nation—can lead to a distortion of the gospel, creating a kind of "dual hope" or "another gospel" that Paul vehemently opposed. This, in Mauro's view, undermines the sufficiency of Christ's work and the unity of God's people.

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[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Mauro

[6] Mauro, Philip. *The Hope of Israel: What Is It?* Hamilton Bros., 1929.

2. Interpretation of Prophecy

A recurring theme in Mauro's work is the critique of what he calls the "literal" interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, which he believes is actually a misreading. Mauro insists that the biblical contrast is not between "literal" and "spiritual," but between "natural" and "spiritual." Prophecies that mention Israel, Zion, Jerusalem, or the land, according to Mauro, often use these terms as types or symbols of deeper spiritual realities. The New Testament, he argues, reinterprets these prophecies in light of Christ's coming, showing that the true fulfillment is spiritual rather than material. Mauro contends that the promises to Israel are realized in the church, which is the body of Christ, rather than in a future, reconstituted Jewish state.

3. Paul's Interpretation and the New Testament Perspective

Mauro points out that the apostle Paul, above all, redefines the hope of Israel in spiritual terms. Paul's writings make clear that the promises made to the patriarchs are fulfilled in Christ, and that all who belong to Christ—whether Jew or Gentile—are heirs to these promises. The "hope of Israel," for Paul, is not a political or territorial restoration but the resurrection from the dead and eternal life in the kingdom of God. Paul's ministry itself becomes a battleground over this issue, as he faces persecution precisely because he proclaims a hope for Israel that is radically different from the prevailing Jewish expectation of national glory.

4. The Faith of the Patriarchs

Mauro explores the hopes and expectations of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, demonstrating that their faith was not centered on the possession of earthly territory. Instead, they looked for a "better country," a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God. The land of Canaan, while promised and possessed in a historical sense, was never the ultimate hope of the patriarchs. Their true aspiration was for eternal life and fellowship with God, which the New Testament reveals as the inheritance of all believers.

5. The Covenants and Conditional Promises

A significant portion of Mauro's argument revolves around the biblical covenants. The Mosaic (Sinaitic) covenant, he notes, was conditional—its blessings depended on Israel's obedience. Because Israel repeatedly broke this covenant, they forfeited the blessings and incurred the curses, culminating in exile and dispersion. Mauro contrasts this with the "new covenant" prophesied by Jeremiah and established by Christ, which is unconditional and based on God's initiative. This new covenant is not limited to ethnic Israel but is extended to all who believe in Christ, making them part of the true people of God.

6. Fulfillment of Promises in Christ

Mauro asserts that all the promises made to Israel—regarding land, nationhood, blessing, and a coming king—are either fulfilled historically (such as Israel's possession of Canaan under Joshua) or are now fulfilled spiritually in Christ and his people. The New Testament repeatedly teaches that Jesus is the true seed of Abraham, the heir of the promises, and that those united to him by faith share in this inheritance. The church, composed of Jews and Gentiles, is now the locus of God's promises.

7. The True Israel and the Olive Tree

One of Mauro's key illustrations is Paul's metaphor of the olive tree in Romans 11. Here, the "natural branches" (unbelieving Jews) are broken off, while "wild branches" (believing Gentiles) are grafted in. The tree itself represents the one people of God, rooted in the patriarchal promises and sustained by faith in Christ. Mauro uses this image to reinforce the point that there is not a separate destiny or hope for ethnic Israel apart from faith in Christ; all who are saved are part of the same tree, the same covenant community.

8. Refutation of Nationalistic and Millennialist Doctrines

Mauro is especially critical of doctrines that predict a future, earthly restoration of Israel or a "Jewish millennium" in which the nation will rule over the world. He argues that such teachings arise from a misreading of prophecy and a failure to recognize the New Testament's spiritualization of Old Testament symbols. According to Mauro, the only millennium explicitly mentioned in Scripture (Revelation 20) is symbolic of the present reign of Christ and his saints, not a future age of Jewish supremacy. He contends that these doctrines divide the people of God and distract from the centrality of Christ's work.

9. The Millennium

Regarding the millennium, Mauro insists that the biblical data is sparse and highly symbolic. He interprets the "thousand years" of Revelation 20 as a figure for the present spiritual reign of Christ with his saints, not as a literal future period of earthly peace and prosperity. The "first resurrection" is understood as the believer's spiritual resurrection with Christ (regeneration), while the "second death" is eternal separation from God. Mauro's view is that the millennium is a present reality, not a future hope, and that all believers already participate in Christ's reign.

10. Mauro's Theology vs. Dispensationalism

Table 1: Mauro's Theology vs. Dispensationalism Theology

Theological Issue	Mauro's Theology	Dispensationalism Theology
Nature of Israel's Hope	Spiritual hope—resurrection, new life in Christ, and a heavenly kingdom accessible to all believers.	Earthly hope—future national restoration, political sovereignty, and material blessings for ethnic Israel.
Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecy	Fulfilled spiritually in Christ and the church ("Israel of God"); typological and realized in the present age.	To be fulfilled literally and materially in a future era, especially concerning the land and national promises.
Definition of Israel	The true Israel is the community of faith (believing Jews and Gentiles united in Christ).	Israel refers specifically to the ethnic descendants of Jacob, distinct from the church.
The Church and Israel	The church is the continuation and fulfillment of Israel—one people of God throughout history.	The church and Israel are two separate entities with different destinies and covenants
The Millennium (1000 years)	Symbolic of the present reign of Christ with his saints in the spiritual realm (not a future earthly era).	A literal, future 1000-year reign of Christ on earth, centered in Jerusalem, with Israel in a position of primacy.
The New Covenant	Already inaugurated by Christ, for all believers (Jew and Gentile); fulfills and supersedes the old covenant.	The new covenant is primarily for Israel and will be fully realized in the future, after Christ's return.
Restoration of Israel	No future national restoration; promises are	Future restoration of Israel as a nation, regathering in the land, and fulfillment of

Theological Issue	Mauro's Theology	Dispensationalism Theology
	fulfilled in Christ and his people now.	all Old Testament promises.
Interpretation of Prophecy	Emphasizes typology, spiritual fulfillment, and New Testament reinterpretation of Old Testament texts.	Emphasizes grammatical-historical, "literal" interpretation, maintaining future fulfillment for Israel.
Salvation	One way of salvation for all—faith in Christ; no "second chance" for Jews or special future salvation.	Salvation is always by faith, but many expect a mass conversion of Jews in the future after the rapture.
Role of Christ's Return.	Marks the end of the age, final judgment, and consummation of all promises; no separate Jewish dispensation.	Christ's return initiates the millennial kingdom and the fulfillment of Israel's national promises.

Conclusion

Philip Mauro's ***The Hope of Israel: What Is It?*** presents a thorough biblical argument that the true hope of Israel is not a future national restoration or an earthly millennium, but the spiritual blessings found in Christ—resurrection, new life, and participation in the kingdom of God, open to all by faith. All Old Testament promises are fulfilled in Christ and his church, the "Israel of God," and not in a future, distinct destiny for the Jewish nation.

Testimony #4: Warfield – Studies in Theology (1932)

The Author: **Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield** (1851–1921) was a leading American theologian and professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. Renowned for his rigorous scholarship and deep commitment to Reformed theology, Warfield was a staunch defender of biblical inerrancy and the authority of Scripture. His prolific writings covered topics such as systematic theology, biblical inspiration, and the relationship between faith and reason. Warfield's legacy endures through his influential works, which continue to shape evangelical and Reformed thought worldwide.[7]

The Book: "***Studies in Theology***"[8] is a collection of essays that systematically explores the foundational doctrines of Christian faith from a Reformed perspective. Warfield addresses topics such as apologetics, the supernatural character of Christianity, the nature and method of systematic theology, and the doctrine of predestination, all with scholarly rigor and deep commitment to the authority of Scripture. Throughout the book, he emphasizes the unity of God's redemptive plan, the centrality of Christ, and the necessity of interpreting biblical revelation in light of its fulfillment in the Church. Warfield's work stands as a robust defense of covenant theology, offering both intellectual clarity and spiritual depth to readers seeking to understand classic Reformed doctrine.

Main Topics and Core Ideas

1. Warfield's Theology in Brief

Benjamin B. Warfield's theology, as presented in "*Studies in Theology*," is deeply rooted in the Reformed tradition and characterized by a rigorous, systematic, and supernatural approach to Christian doctrine. Below is a summary of Warfield's convictions as distilled from the book:

i. **Scripture as Foundation:** All true theology is grounded in divine revelation, with the Bible as its supreme and infallible authority for doctrine and life.

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[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B._B._Warfield
[8] Warfield, Benjamin B. *Studies in Theology*. Oxford University Press, 1932.

ii. **Supernatural Christianity:** Christianity is essentially supernatural—rooted in the transcendent God, miraculous revelation, redemption, and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Attempts to reduce Christianity to a mere ethical or natural system are rejected.

iii. **Systematic and Scientific:** Theology must be systematic—organized, coherent, and rational—reflecting the unity and fullness of revealed truth.

iv. **Apologetics is Foundational:** Apologetics is the starting point of theology, establishing the rational grounds for belief in God, revelation, and the truth of Christianity.

v. **Sovereign Grace and Predestination:** God sovereignly elects some to salvation, not based on foreseen merit, but solely by His will and grace. This doctrine is central to assurance and humility in the Christian life.

vi. **Doctrine for Life:** Theology serves the practical purpose of sanctifying and comforting believers and building up the church—not merely intellectual speculation.

vii. **Progressive Understanding:** The church grows in its understanding of revealed truth over time, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Warfield's theology is in significant contradiction to Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and much of Evangelical Literalism. He championed covenant theology, the unity of God's people in Christ, and a Christ-centered, typological reading of Scripture, which stands in marked contrast to the distinctive emphases of these three modern theological movements.

2. Dispensationalism vs. Warfield's Theology

A. Israel and the Church

- **Dispensationalism:** Maintains a sharp and enduring distinction between Israel (God's earthly people) and the Church (God's heavenly people). The Church is seen as a "parenthesis" in God's plan, with national Israel's promises awaiting future, literal fulfillment.
- **Warfield:** Advocates covenant theology, which sees the Church as the continuation and fulfillment of Israel. All believers, whether Jew or Gentile, are united in Christ as the true people of God. The promises to Israel are fulfilled spiritually in Christ and the Church, not in a future national restoration.

B. Eschatology and the Millennium

- **Dispensationalism:** Teaches a premillennial, often pre-tribulational rapture, with a future literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth, centered in Jerusalem, and a rebuilt temple.
- **Warfield:** Held to an amillennial or postmillennial view, seeing the "millennium" as either the present reign of Christ or the gradual triumph of the gospel, not a future Jewish-centric earthly reign. He rejected the idea of a restored Jewish temple or sacrificial system.

C. Hermeneutics

- **Dispensationalism:** Insists on a strict literal interpretation of biblical prophecy, especially in the Old Testament, unless the text clearly indicates otherwise.
- **Warfield:** Emphasizes a Christ-centered, typological, and redemptive-historical reading of Scripture. He believes the New Testament reinterprets and fulfills Old Testament prophecies, often in non-literal ways.

Table 2: Dispensationalism vs. Warfield

Issue	Dispensationalism Position	Warfield's Position	Contradiction?
Israel & the Church	Sharp distinction, separate destinies	Church is fulfillment of Israel	Yes
Eschatology	Premillennial, future Jewish kingdom	Amillennial/Postmillennial, no future Jewish kingdom	Yes
Hermeneutics	Literal fulfillment of OT prophecy	Typological/Christ-centered fulfillment	Yes

3. Christian Zionism vs. Warfield's Theology

A. Modern State of Israel and Prophecy

- **Christian Zionism:** Asserts that the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948 is a fulfillment of biblical prophecy and that God's covenant with the Jewish people remains in force, including the land promises.

- **Warfield:** Interprets the land and nation promises to Israel as fulfilled in Christ and the Church. He does not see the modern state of Israel as theologically significant or prophetically necessary. For Warfield, the true heirs of Abraham's promises are those who are in Christ, regardless of ethnicity.

B. Theological Status of Jews and Gentiles

- **Christian Zionism:** Teaches that Jews have a unique, ongoing role in God's redemptive plan, distinct from the Church.
- **Warfield:** Rejects any ongoing ethnic distinction in God's plan after Christ. The dividing wall is broken down (Eph. 2:14), and all who are in Christ are one new humanity and heirs of the promises.

C. Support for Political Israel

- **Christian Zionism:** Encourages political and material support for the modern nation of Israel based on biblical mandate.
- **Warfield:** Would see no biblical warrant for such support, as the focus of God's redemptive work is the Church, not a modern nation-state.

Table 3: Christian Zionism vs. Warfield

Issue	Christian Zionism Position	Warfield's Position	Contradiction?
Modern Israel & Prophecy	Modern Israel fulfills prophecy	Prophecy fulfilled in Christ/Church	Yes
Jews' Ongoing Status	Jews have a unique future role	Jews and Gentiles united in Christ	Yes
Political Support for Israel	Biblically mandated	No biblical mandate	Yes

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4. Evangelical Literalism vs. Warfield's Theology

A. Hermeneutics (Interpretation of Prophecy)

- **Evangelical Literalism:** Insists on a "plain sense" or literal interpretation of all biblical texts, including apocalyptic and prophetic passages.
- **Warfield:** Advocates grammatical-historical exegesis but recognizes literary genre, symbolism, and typology. He argues that many Old Testament

prophecies are fulfilled spiritually or typologically in Christ and the Church, not always literally.

B. Old Testament Promises

- **Evangelical Literalism:** Expects a literal fulfillment of OT promises (e.g., land, temple, sacrifices) in the future.
- **Warfield:** Sees these as types and shadows fulfilled in the person and work of Christ, and in the Church as the new covenant people.

C. Eschatology

- **Evangelical Literalism:** Often aligns with premillennial or dispensational eschatology, expecting a literal earthly kingdom, rebuilt temple, and restored sacrifices.
- **Warfield:** Rejects a future restoration of the temple or sacrificial system and interprets the "kingdom of God" as already present and spiritual in Christ.

Table 4: Evangelical Literalism vs. Warfield

Issue	Evangelical Literalism Position	Warfield's Position	Contradiction?
Hermeneutics	Strict literal interpretation	Allows typology, genre, NT fulfillment	Yes
OT Promises	Literal future fulfillment	Spiritual/typological fulfillment	Yes
Eschatology	Literal kingdom, temple, sacrifices	Present spiritual kingdom, no future temple	Yes

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Conclusion

Warfield's theology stands in clear and detailed contradiction to the core tenets of Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and Evangelical Literalism. He upholds a covenantal, Christ-centered, and typological reading of Scripture that sees the Church as the true continuation of Israel, the Old Testament fulfilled in Christ, and the promises of God realized in the unity of all believers—not in a future, separate destiny for ethnic Israel or a literalistic reading of prophecy.

Testimony #5: Barth – Church Dogmatics (1932)

The Author: **Karl Barth** (1886–1968) was a Swiss Reformed theologian. Barth is best known for his commentary *The Epistle to the Romans*, his involvement in the *Confessing Church*, including his authorship (except for a single phrase) of the *Barmen Declaration*, and especially his unfinished multi-volume theological summa the *Church Dogmatics* (published between 1932 and 1967). Barth's influence expanded well beyond the academic realm to mainstream culture, and he had a profound influence on modern Christian Ethics.[9]

The Book: "***Church Dogmatics***"[10] is a monumental work of twentieth-century Christian theology, spanning over six million words in four main volumes. Written between 1932 and 1967, it systematically explores the doctrines of the Christian faith with a radical focus on Jesus Christ as the center of all revelation and knowledge of God. Barth rejects natural theology and human attempts to reach God, insisting that God's self-disclosure in Christ is the sole foundation for understanding Scripture, creation, salvation, and the life of the church. The work is renowned for its depth, complexity, and Christocentric approach, offering a comprehensive and transformative vision of Christian doctrine that continues to shape theological thought and debate.

Core Ideas

a. Barth's Theology in *Church Dogmatics*

The essence of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* is a theology centered on God's revelation in Christ, the authority of Scripture, and the radical grace of God. Human efforts, reason, or religion cannot reach God—only God's initiative in Christ does. All doctrine, ethics, and church practice must be grounded in this revelation.

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[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Barth

[10] Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics, Volumes I, II, III &IV*. T&T Clark, published between 1932 and 1967.

1. **Centrality of Jesus Christ:** Barth's theology is radically Christocentric. He insists that all knowledge of God comes through Jesus Christ, who is both the revelation of God and the true humanity.
2. **Revelation over Religion:** Barth rejects natural theology (the idea that God can be known through reason or nature alone). Instead, he argues that God reveals Himself freely and decisively in Jesus Christ and through Scripture. Human religion is seen as humanity's attempt to reach God, but true knowledge of God is only possible through God's self-revelation.
3. **The Word of God:** Barth teaches that the Word of God is threefold:
    - **Revealed Word** (Jesus Christ)
    - **Written Word** (Scripture)
    - **Proclaimed Word** (Preaching) Scripture is authoritative because it witnesses to God's revelation in Christ.
4. **Doctrine of Election:** Barth reinterprets the traditional doctrine of predestination. In his view, Jesus Christ is both the electing God and the elected man. God's election is not arbitrary but is revealed in Christ's self-giving for humanity.
5. **God's Sovereignty and Grace:** Barth emphasizes the absolute sovereignty and freedom of God. Salvation is entirely by grace, not human achievement. God's covenant with humanity is initiated and maintained by God alone.
6. **Sin and Reconciliation:** Barth sees sin as humanity's rejection of God, but also stresses that reconciliation is accomplished solely in Christ. Christ's work on the cross is the definitive act of God's grace, overcoming sin and restoring relationship.
7. **The Church:** The Church exists to witness to the revelation of God in Christ. Its authority is derived from its calling to proclaim the Word, not from itself.

b. Dispensationalism vs. Barth's Theology

Dispensationalism divides biblical history into distinct eras and often interprets prophecy and Scripture with a focus on literal, future fulfillment—especially regarding Israel and eschatology.

Detailed Contradictions

- **Fragmented Revelation**: Dispensationalism sees God's activity as divided across different dispensations, each with its own covenant and rules. Barth

insists that God's revelation is unified in Jesus Christ, not split into historical segments.

- **Prophecy and Fulfillment**: Dispensationalists expect literal, future fulfillment of biblical prophecies, especially those concerning Israel. Barth argues that all prophecy finds its fulfillment in Christ, not in future political or national events.
- **Nature of the Church**: Dispensationalism often maintains a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church. Barth sees the Church as the continuation of God's covenant people, united in Christ, not as a separate entity from Israel.
- **Scripture Interpretation**: Dispensationalists favor a literal, predictive reading of prophecy. Barth prioritizes a theological, Christ-centered interpretation.

Table 5: Dispensationalism vs. Barth

Dispensationalism Core Belief	Barth's Contradictory Position
History divided into dispensations	Revelation unified in Jesus Christ
Prophecy fulfilled literally in future	Prophecy fulfilled in Christ
Israel and Church sharply separated	Church is the covenant people in Christ
Predictive, literal prophecy reading	Theological, Christocentric interpretation

c. Christian Zionism vs. Barth's Theology

Christian Zionism teaches that biblical promises about the land of Israel remain literally valid for the modern Jewish state and often supports political Zionism based on these prophecies.

Detailed Contradictions

- **Land Promises**: Christian Zionists claim Old Testament land promises apply directly to modern Israel. Barth asserts that all Old Testament promises are fulfilled in Christ, and the New Covenant is not tied to land or nation.
- **Political Theology**: Christian Zionism merges biblical promises with contemporary politics. Barth resists politicizing Scripture, arguing that its fulfillment is spiritual and Christological.

- **Covenant Identity**: Christian Zionists see ethnic Israel as central to God's ongoing purposes. Barth teaches that the Church, comprised of all nations in Christ, is the covenant community.
- **Interpretation of Prophecy**: Christian Zionists read prophecy as a roadmap for current events. Barth reads prophecy as testimony to Christ's redemptive work.

Table 6: Christian Zionism vs. Barth

Christian Zionism Core Belief	Barth's Contradictory Position
Land promises literal for modern Israel	Promises fulfilled in Christ, not land
Biblical prophecy guides politics	Fulfillment is spiritual, not political
Ethnic Israel as covenant center	Church as covenant community in Christ
Prophecy as contemporary roadmap	Prophecy as witness to Christ

d. Evangelical Literalism vs. Barth's Theology

Evangelical Literalism insists on the literal interpretation of Scripture, including creation accounts, miracles, and prophecy.

Detailed Contradictions

- **Literal vs. Theological Reading**: Evangelical literalists interpret biblical texts at face value. Barth insists that Scripture's true meaning is theological, centered on Christ, and must be read in light of God's revelation.
- **Authority of Scripture**: Literalists sometimes treat the Bible as a set of infallible propositions. Barth teaches that Scripture is authoritative as it witnesses to Christ, not as a collection of factual statements.
- **Nature of Revelation**: Literalists may see the Bible itself as revelation. Barth says revelation is ultimately God's act in Christ, with Scripture as a witness to that act.
- **Role of Human Reason**: Literalists often claim certainty based on the text. Barth warns against human certainty, emphasizing the mystery and freedom of God's revelation.

Table 7: Evangelical Literalism vs. Barth

Evangelical Literalism Core Belief	Barth's Contradictory Position
Scripture interpreted literally	Scripture interpreted theologically in Christ
Bible as infallible propositions	Bible as witness to Christ's revelation
Bible itself as revelation	Revelation is God's act in Christ
Certainty from literal text	Mystery and freedom in God's revelation

e. Summary

Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics presents a theology that is:

- Christ-centered (all revelation and Scripture point to Christ)
- Theological (not literalistic or predictive)
- Anti-fragmentation (rejects dividing history or revelation into separate eras or political mandates)
- Spiritual fulfillment (not tied to land, nation, or face-value readings)

Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and Evangelical Literalism each contradict Barth's approach in their core interpretive methods, their view of prophecy and fulfillment, and their understanding of the Church and revelation.

Testimony #6: Berkhof – Systematic Theology (1938)

The Author: **Louis Berkhof** (1873–1957) was a distinguished Dutch-American theologian and professor, renowned for his clear and comprehensive exposition of Reformed theology. He served as president and professor at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he taught for nearly four decades. Berkhof's most famous work, Systematic Theology (1938), remains a foundational text in Reformed seminaries worldwide. His writings are noted for their clarity, organization, and commitment to the historic Reformed faith.[11]

The Book: "***Systematic Theology***"[12] is a comprehensive and influential work in Reformed theology, widely used as a textbook in seminaries and Bible schools. The book systematically presents the doctrines of the Christian faith, beginning with the doctrine of God and proceeding through topics such as revelation, the attributes of God, the Trinity, creation, and the decrees of God. The work is characterized by its careful analysis of historical, biblical, and philosophical perspectives, always seeking to ground doctrine in Scripture and the Reformed tradition.

Core Ideas

a. The Theological Positions of Louis Berkhof

Louis Berkhof (1873–1957) stands as one of the most influential Reformed theologians of the twentieth century. His *Systematic Theology* remains a standard text in seminaries and churches for its clarity, comprehensiveness, and faithfulness to the Reformed tradition. Berkhof's theology is deeply rooted in the historic confessions of the Reformation, particularly the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort), and reflects a mature articulation of classic Calvinist thought. This essay explores the major contours of Berkhof's theological positions, highlighting his approach to Scripture, God, salvation, the Church, and eschatology.

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[11] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Berkhof

[12] Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. Eerdmans Publishing, 1938.

1. **Scripture and Revelation:** Berkhof affirms the Bible as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. He emphasizes a redemptive-historical approach to interpretation, reading the Old Testament in light of its fulfillment in Christ and the New Testament. This method highlights the unity of Scripture and avoids a strictly literal or fragmented reading.
2. **Doctrine of God and the Trinity:** Berkhof teaches classical theism: God is sovereign, transcendent, and immanent. He distinguishes God's incommunicable attributes (like immutability and infinity) from communicable ones (like wisdom and love). His doctrine of the Trinity is orthodox—one God in three persons—central for understanding God's work and revelation.
3. **Creation, Providence, and Decrees:** Berkhof holds that God created all things out of nothing, sustains them by providence, and governs history according to His eternal decrees. He affirms predestination, emphasizing that salvation is rooted in God's sovereign grace, not human merit.
4. **Salvation and Christology:** Salvation, for Berkhof, is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He upholds the classic "Five Points of Calvinism" and teaches that Christ is both fully divine and fully human, accomplishing redemption for His people.
5. **The Church and Sacraments:** Berkhof sees the Church as the spiritual continuation of Israel, the one people of God. He supports infant baptism and views the sacraments as means of grace, not just symbols.
6. **Eschatology:** Berkhof's eschatology is amillennial, rejecting dispensationalist and literalist schemes. He interprets prophetic promises as fulfilled in Christ and the Church, not in a future restoration of national Israel or a literal millennium.

b. Berkhof vs. Dispensationalism

Table 8: Berkhof vs. Dispensationalism

Doctrine/ Theme	Berkhof (Reformed Theology)	Dispensationalism	C-Type
Hermeneutics	Christ-centered, typological, redemptive-historical	Literal fulfillment, especially of prophecy	Direct

Doctrine/ Theme	Berkhof (Reformed Theology)	Dispensationalism	C-Type
Israel and the Church	Church is spiritual Israel; no permanent distinction	Sharp distinction; separate destinies	Direct
Covenants vs. Dispensations	Unified covenants; one plan of salvation	Multiple dispensations; different rules for each	Direct
Purpose of God in History	Single, unified redemptive plan	Dual purposes: one for Israel, one for the Church	Direct
Millennium	Amillennial or postmillennial; no literal 1,000-year reign	Premillennial; literal future 1,000-year reign	Direct
Rapture	No pre-tribulation rapture; one return of Christ	Pre-tribulation rapture; multiple returns	Direct
Law and Gospel	Unified moral law; Gospel applies to all	Law for Israel, grace for Church; sharp division	Direct/ Tension
Nature of the Church	Church is the true people of God in all ages	Church is a new, distinct entity	Direct
End Times Structure	Single resurrection/ judgment	Multiple resurrections/ judgments	Direct
Theological Method	Uses confessions and creeds; tradition valued	Often anti-creedal; “Bible only” approach	Direct/ Tension

C-Type = Contradiction Type

c. Berkhof vs. Christian Zionism

Table 9: Berkhof vs. Christian Zionism

Doctrine/ Theme	Berkhof (Reformed Theology)	Christian Zionism	C-Type
Land Promises	Fulfilled in Christ and the Church; not for modern Israel	Ongoing, literal claim for ethnic Israel	Direct
Modern State of Israel	No unique theological status	Theologically significant; fulfillment of prophecy	Direct

Doctrine/ Theme	Berkhof (Reformed Theology)	Christian Zionism	C-Type
Prophecy	Interpreted spiritually/ Christologically	Interpreted as literal, future for Israel	Direct
Restoration of Israel	No future national restoration promised	Expects national and territorial restoration	Direct
Mission and Evangelism	Mission to all nations; Church is "new Israel"	Mission often includes focus on Jewish restoration	Direct/ Tension
End Times Signs	No necessary prophetic significance to modern Israel	Modern Israel central to end-times fulfillment	Direct

C-Type = Contradiction Type

d. Berkhof vs. Evangelical Literalism

Table 10: Berkhof vs. Evangelical Literalism

Doctrine/ Theme	Berkhof (Reformed Theology)	Evangelical Literalism	C-Type
Hermeneutics	Christ-centered, typological, redemptive-historical	Literal fulfillment, especially of prophecy	Direct
Old Testament Prophecy	Fulfilled in Christ and the Church	Awaiting literal fulfillment	Direct
Millennium	Present or symbolic; not literal or future	Literal future 1,000-year reign	Direct
Temple and Sacrifices	Present or symbolic; not literal or future	Expects rebuilt temple and sacrifices	Direct
Role of Old Testament	Church is the true people of God in all ages	Church is a new, distinct entity	Direct
End Times Structure	Single resurrection/ judgment	Multiple resurrections/ judgments	Direct

Doctrine/ Theme	Berkhof (Reformed Theology)	Evangelical Literalism	C-Type
Law and Gospel	Unified; fulfilled in Christ	Often sharp division between OT law and NT grace	Direct/ Tension
Use of Tradition	Values historic creeds/ confessions	Often “Bible only”; suspicion of tradition	Direct/ Tension

C-Type = Contradiction Type

e. Summary

Berkhof’s Reformed theology stands in direct and systematic contradiction to the key doctrines and interpretive frameworks of Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and Evangelical Literalism. These contradictions are not minor but touch the core of biblical interpretation, prophecy, Israel and the Church, and the structure of redemptive history.

Testimony #7: Hendriksen – More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation (1940)

The Author: **William Hendriksen** (1900–1982) was a respected American New Testament scholar, pastor, and author. He served as a professor of New Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary and was well known for his clear, scholarly, and accessible commentaries on various books of the New Testament. Hendriksen's best-known works include More Than Conquerors, his influential commentary on Revelation, and his multi-volume New Testament Commentary series. His writings reflect a deep commitment to Reformed theology, careful biblical exegesis, and pastoral sensitivity, making him a trusted voice among evangelical and Reformed Christians.[13]

The Book: "***More Than Conquerors***"[14] is a classic interpretation of the Book of Revelation, aimed at providing comfort, insight, and hope to Christians, especially those facing persecution. Hendriksen emphasizes the relevance of Revelation both to the early Church and to believers throughout history. He presents the book as a series of symbolic visions that run in parallel, each spanning the entire period from Christ's first coming to His return, rather than as a strict chronological sequence of future events.

Key Topics and Core Ideas

a. Purpose, Theme, and Authorship

- **Purpose:** Hendriksen argues that Revelation's original and ongoing purpose is to comfort, encourage, and embolden the Church in every age, especially during times of persecution. He explicitly rejects the dispensationalist and literalist notion that the book's main value lies in forecasting specific future events or modern political developments. Instead, he insists that the message

[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Hendriksen

[14] Hendriksen, William. *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*. Baker Book House, 1940.

was immediately relevant to the first-century Church and remains so for all Christians, not just for a supposed "end-times generation".

- **Theme:** The central theme is the present and ultimate victory of Christ and His Church over Satan and evil, not a timetable of future catastrophes or a coded prediction of world history. Hendriksen critiques the tendency of dispensational and literalist interpreters to treat the book as a "history written beforehand," packed with secret references to Napoleon, Hitler, or contemporary nations. He dismisses such readings as not only speculative but pastorally useless, since they would have offered no comfort or meaning to John's original audience.
- **Authorship:** Hendriksen affirms the traditional view that the apostle John wrote Revelation, but he also insists—contrary to literalist readings—that John's purpose was not to serve as a journalist of the future, but as a prophetic witness to God's sovereignty and Christ's reign in the present and future.

b. Structure of Revelation

Seven Parallel Sections:

A major critique of dispensationalism and literalism is Hendriksen's insistence that Revelation is not a linear, chronological account of future events. Instead, he argues for "progressive parallelism": the book contains seven parallel sections (cycles), each covering the entire span of history between Christ's first and second coming. These cycles—lampstands, seals, trumpets, etc.—do not unfold in sequence, but rather offer different perspectives on the same spiritual realities.

This approach directly opposes the dispensationalist view, which sees the book as a roadmap of future events, often divided into distinct dispensations (eras), with the Church "raptured" out of the world before a literal seven-year tribulation. Hendriksen's structure upholds the relevance of the entire book for the entire Church age, not just for a supposed end-times remnant.

Two Major Divisions:

He further divides the book into two major parts:

- Chapters 1–11: The Church's outward struggle with the world.
- Chapters 12–22: The deeper spiritual conflict between Christ and Satan.

This organization underscores that the book's focus is not a literal end-times chronology but the ongoing, cyclical reality of spiritual warfare and victory throughout the Church's existence.

c. Unity and Progression

- **Organic Unity:** Hendriksen rejects the literalist charge that Revelation is a confusing jumble of visions. He sees it as a cohesive, organic whole, with each section reinforcing the others. This unity is lost, he claims, when literalism tries to assign each vision to a specific future event or historical epoch—a hallmark of dispensationalist "newspaper prophecy".
- **Progression in Emphasis:** While the seven sections are parallel, they also show progression in intensity and focus. Rather than offering a timeline of events (as dispensationalism insists), the book moves from general themes of conflict and perseverance to climactic visions of final judgment and renewal. This progression is spiritual and theological, not chronological or political.

d. Symbolism

- **Nature of Symbolism:** One of Hendriksen's most pointed critiques of Evangelical Literalism is his insistence that Revelation is a book of symbols, not literal predictions. He warns against the "spiritualizing" or hyper-literalizing of every detail—such as treating the locusts as helicopters, or the mark of the beast as a literal microchip. Instead, he argues that each vision has a central, spiritual lesson, and the details serve the overall picture, not a secret code.
- **Principles for Interpreting Symbols:** Don't press every detail: Most details are there to fill out the picture, not to serve as a one-to-one allegory.
- **Symbols represent timeless principles:** The "seals," "trumpets," "bowls," etc., are not predictions of single, future events, but symbols of recurring realities and divine principles at work throughout history.
- **Scripture interprets Scripture:** The meaning of Revelation's symbols is rooted in the Old Testament and the broader biblical narrative, not in contemporary headlines.

e. Interpretive Principles

- **Contemporary and Ongoing Relevance:** Hendriksen insists that Revelation was written to be understood by its first readers and to speak to believers in every age. He criticizes the dispensationalist and literalist tendency to postpone most of the book's fulfillment to a distant future, thereby robbing it of its comfort and challenge for today. The book's message is always "up to date," addressing the Church's perennial struggles and triumphs.

- **Scriptural Background:** He asserts that Revelation's imagery is thoroughly grounded in the Old Testament, especially Daniel, Ezekiel, and the prophets. Literalist readings that ignore this context, or that treat the book as a codebook for modern events, miss its biblical depth and meaning.
- **God's Sovereignty, Not Human Timetables:** Above all, Hendriksen insists that Revelation is about God's sovereign rule over history and the assurance of Christ's present and ultimate victory. He explicitly rejects the dispensationalist obsession with end-times speculation, arguing that the book's purpose is not to satisfy curiosity about future events but to inspire faithfulness, hope, and courage now.

In summary, Hendriksen's More Than Conquerors challenges the foundations of dispensationalism and Evangelical Literalism by presenting Revelation as a symbolic, cyclical, and Christ-centered book. Its message is not a coded forecast of the end-times, but a timeless and ever-relevant assurance that Christ reigns, the Church conquers through Him, and God's purposes are being fulfilled in every age—not just in a literal, future "tribulation".

Testimony #8: Allis – Prophecy and the Church (1945)

The Author: **Oswald T. Allis** (1880–1973) was an eminent American biblical scholar and theologian. He earned his Ph.D. from Princeton University and served as a professor of Old Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary before helping to found Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929. Allis is widely recognized for his scholarly contributions to Old Testament studies and his influential critiques of dispensational theology, most notably in his book Prophecy and the Church (1945). His work is marked by careful exegesis, a commitment to Reformed theology, and a deep concern for the unity of God's people.[15]

The Book: "***Prophecy and the Church***"[16] critically examines the Dispensationalist claim that the Christian Church is a "mystery parenthesis" that interrupts the fulfillment of Old Testament kingdom prophecies concerning Israel. Allis addresses a pivotal question in Christian theology: Does the New Testament Church fulfill or interrupt Old Testament kingdom prophecies? He argues against the Dispensationalist view, advocating for the traditional understanding that the Church is indeed the fulfillment of these prophecies and not a parenthetical interruption. This issue is not only theological but also has practical implications for Christian unity, Jewish-Christian relations, and the interpretation of biblical prophecy in light of historical and current events.

Major Topics and Core Ideas

A. Historical and Theological Background

1. Millenarianism vs. Dispensationalism

Allis traces the historical development of eschatological thought in the Church, distinguishing between:

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[15] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oswald_Thompson_Allis

[16] Allis, Oswald T. *Prophecy and the Church*. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1945.

- **Amillennialism:** The belief that the "millennium" is a present, spiritual reality fulfilled in the Church age, not a literal future thousand-year reign on earth. This view is rooted in Augustine's interpretation, which spiritualizes the "thousand years" of Revelation 20 as the period between Christ's first and second advents.
- **Postmillennialism:** The view, popularized by Whitby, that the Church will usher in a golden age of righteousness and peace (the millennium) before Christ returns.
- **Premillennialism:** The belief, with ancient roots, that Christ will return to earth before a literal millennium. This view was revived in modern times, particularly by the Brethren movement.
- **Dispensationalism:** A modern, distinct form of premillennialism that divides biblical history into discrete "dispensations" or periods, each with its own method of God's dealing with humanity. Dispensationalism uniquely claims that the present Church age is a "parenthesis" in God's plan for Israel, and that the prophetic clock for Israel will resume after the Church is removed (raptured) from the earth.

2. Origins and Spread of Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism's roots are traced to early 19th-century England, particularly the Plymouth Brethren and the influential teachings of John Nelson Darby. The movement spread to North America through figures like James H. Brookes and was popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible, which systematized and disseminated Dispensationalist theology to a broad evangelical audience.

B. Principles of Dispensational Interpretation

1. Literalism

Dispensationalists insist that biblical prophecy, especially Old Testament promises to Israel, must be interpreted literally—meaning Israel always means ethnic/national Israel, and the land promises must be fulfilled physically and geographically. This literalism is applied unevenly, however, as Dispensationalists often use non-literal, typological, or allegorical interpretations for Old Testament narratives when it suits their system (e.g., finding "types" of the Church in Old Testament women or events), while denying the Church's presence in Old Testament prophecy.

2. Separation of Israel and the Church

A fundamental Dispensationalist claim is that Israel and the Church are two distinct peoples of God with different destinies:

- **Israel:** God's earthly people, recipients of literal, national, and territorial promises.
- **The Church:** A "heavenly" body, a mystery not revealed in the Old Testament, with spiritual and heavenly blessings. This distinction is rigidly maintained, so that prophecies and promises to Israel cannot be applied to the Church, and vice versa.

3. The Parenthesis Church and the Prophetic Program

Dispensationalists assert that the Church age was unforeseen by Old Testament prophets and is a "parenthesis" interrupting the prophetic timeline for Israel. The Church began at Pentecost and will end with the rapture; after this, God will resume His dealings with Israel, fulfilling the remaining prophecies literally.

4. Futurism

Dispensationalism is thoroughly futurist regarding prophecy: most Old Testament predictions about Israel's restoration, the temple, and the kingdom are yet to be fulfilled, and will take place in a future "Jewish age" after the Church is removed.

C. Relationship Between Prophecy, Israel, and the Church

1. Traditional Christian View

Historically, the Church has been seen as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. The promises to Abraham and David, and the predictions of a coming kingdom, were understood as finding their ultimate realization in Christ and His Church, which is comprised of both believing Jews and Gentiles.

2. Dispensationalist Innovation

Dispensationalists break with this tradition by insisting that Old Testament kingdom prophecies are not being fulfilled in the Church but await a future, literal fulfillment for Israel. The Church is not the "new Israel" or the heir of Israel's promises, but a distinct body whose existence was a "mystery" not revealed to the prophets.

3. Continuity vs. Discontinuity

Allis argues for the essential unity of God's redemptive plan. He shows that the New Testament writers, especially Paul, see the Church as the continuation and fulfillment of God's promises to Israel, not a separate or parenthetical entity. The "olive tree" metaphor in Romans 11, for instance, teaches that Gentile believers are grafted into the ongoing people of God, not a new, disconnected body.

D. Exegesis of Key Biblical Texts

1. Old Testament Prophecies

Allis demonstrates that many Old Testament prophecies, when interpreted in light of the New Testament, refer to the Church:

- Abrahamic Covenant: The promise of blessing to “all nations” is fulfilled in the global, multi-ethnic Church, not just in ethnic Israel.
- Davidic Kingdom: The New Testament applies the promises of an eternal Davidic king and kingdom to Jesus and His reign in the Church.
- Prophets’ Universalism: Isaiah, Joel, and others foresee the inclusion of the Gentiles and a worldwide salvation, which the New Testament applies to the Church.

2. New Testament Application

The apostles repeatedly quote and apply Old Testament prophecies to the Church:

- Acts: Peter applies Joel’s prophecy of the outpouring of the Spirit to the birth of the Church at Pentecost; James applies Amos’s prophecy about the restoration of “David’s fallen tent” to the inclusion of Gentiles in the Church.
- Pauline Epistles: Paul interprets promises to Abraham as fulfilled in Christ and those who belong to Him, regardless of ethnicity (Galatians 3:28-29), and uses the olive tree metaphor to teach the unity of Jews and Gentiles in one people of God (Romans 11).
- Hebrews: The “new covenant” of Jeremiah is said to be fulfilled in the Church, not in a future dispensation for Israel alone.

3. Olive Tree Analogy (Romans 11)

Paul’s teaching on the olive tree (Romans 11) is central to Allis’s argument. The natural branches (Israel) are broken off for unbelief, and wild branches (Gentiles) are grafted in by faith. There is one tree—one people of God—composed of believing Jews and Gentiles. This undermines the Dispensationalist claim of two separate peoples and illustrates the continuity of God’s redemptive plan.

E. The Second Coming and the Rapture

1. Imminence and the "Any Moment" Doctrine

Dispensationalists teach that Christ’s return for the Church (the rapture) can happen “at any moment,” prior to a period of tribulation and Christ’s visible return. Allis critiques this view by showing:

- The New Testament does not clearly distinguish two separate comings (one for the Church, one for Israel).
- The key Greek terms for Christ's return (parousia, epiphaneia, apokalypsis) are used interchangeably for both the rapture and the visible second coming, with no consistent technical distinction.

2. Parenthesis and Pretribulationism

Dispensationalists posit a gap ("parenthesis") of at least seven years between the rapture and Christ's visible return, during which the prophesied tribulation and the fulfillment of Daniel's 70th week will occur. Allis finds this scenario unsubstantiated by Scripture and argues that it is the product of system-driven exegesis rather than a plain reading of the biblical text.

F. Theological and Practical Implications

1. Church Unity and Interpretation

Allis warns that Dispensationalism introduces a divisive hermeneutic into evangelical Christianity, making cooperation difficult between those who hold to historic, Reformed views and those who adopt Dispensationalist distinctives. He argues that this division is not merely academic but has real consequences for the unity, mission, and witness of the Church.

2. Jewish-Christian Relations

The question of the Church's relationship to Israel is not only theological but also has implications for Christian attitudes toward the Jewish people, Zionism, and the modern state of Israel. Allis urges a gospel-centered approach that sees the supreme need of all, Jew and Gentile, as faith in Christ and inclusion in the Church, rather than a focus on national or territorial restoration.

In conclusion, Allis's "*Prophecy and the Church"* is a thorough critique of Dispensationalism, defending the historic Christian view that the Church is the fulfillment, not the interruption, of Old Testament prophetic promises. He exposes the inconsistencies and novelties of Dispensationalist interpretation, demonstrates the continuity between Israel and the Church, and upholds the authority of the New Testament's application of prophecy. The book remains a significant resource for those studying the history of biblical interpretation, Christian eschatology, and the ongoing debate over the relationship between Israel, the Church, and prophecy

Testimony #9: Murray – Millennial studies: A Search for Truth (1948)

The Author: **George L. Murray** (1884–1966) was an American Presbyterian minister, theologian, and author known for his scholarly and pastoral work in the mid-twentieth century. He served as a pastor in several Presbyterian churches and was recognized for his thoughtful engagement with biblical prophecy and eschatology. Murray is best remembered for his book Millennial Studies (1948), in which he offered a significant critique of dispensationalism and the Scofield Reference Bible. His writings reflect a commitment to historic Reformed theology and a desire to uphold the unity and continuity of God's redemptive plan.[17]

The Book: "***Millennial Studies: A Search for Truth***"[18] is a thorough critique and analysis of eschatological (end-times) doctrines, particularly focusing on the rise and influence of dispensational premillennialism within modern Christianity. The book aims to clarify what the Bible teaches regarding the second coming of Christ, the nature of the millennium, and related prophetic themes, challenging popular interpretations that have become widespread in evangelical circles, especially those propagated by the Scofield Reference Bible and its followers. Murray's approach is rooted in careful scriptural examination, historical context, and a call for theological humility and unity among Christians despite differing views on eschatology.

Main Topics and Core Ideas

A. The Importance of Eschatology

Eschatology—the study of last things or end-times—is presented by Murray as a significant, yet often misunderstood, branch of Christian doctrine. He notes that while it is not essential to salvation, it is crucial for a well-rounded understanding of the

[17] This biographical summary is based on the book's title page, dedication, and preface, where Murray identifies himself as minister of the First United Presbyterian Church of Boston and provides context for his work and theological journey.
[18] Murray, George L. *Millennial studies: A Search for Truth*. Baker Book House, 1948.

Christian faith and for the teaching responsibilities of ministers. The author laments that many Christians, including clergy, have inherited their eschatological views from tradition, popular teachers, or widely circulated study Bibles rather than from personal, diligent study of the Scriptures. This lack of personal investigation has led to widespread confusion and the uncritical adoption of speculative or sensationalist end-times theories. Murray calls for a more responsible, scripture-centered approach, especially among ministers, to provide clarity and stability for their congregations.

B. Critique of Dispensationalism

Murray dedicates significant attention to critiquing dispensationalism, a system that divides biblical history into discrete "dispensations" or periods, each with different methods of God's administration. Dispensationalism, popularized in the 19th and 20th centuries by figures like John Nelson Darby and C. I. Scofield, asserts a rigid distinction between Israel and the Church, and insists on a literal fulfillment of Old Testament promises to the Jews, including a future, earthly kingdom in Palestine. Murray argues that such distinctions are foreign to the spirit and letter of the New Testament, which sees fulfillment in Christ and the Church. He also critiques the Scofield Reference Bible for presenting its interpretations as unquestionable dogma, leading many readers to mistake marginal notes for scripture itself. Murray sees the spread of dispensationalism as a major factor in the theological confusion of his era and calls for a return to careful, contextual, and holistic scriptural interpretation.

C. Biblical Covenants and Prophecy

A central focus of Murray's analysis is the interpretation of God's covenant with Abraham and the prophetic promises related to Israel. He argues that the promises of land and nationhood were historically fulfilled in the Old Testament period. The New Testament, according to Murray, reinterprets these promises: the "seed of Abraham" is ultimately Christ and those who are in Christ, regardless of ethnicity. Thus, the church—comprised of both Jews and Gentiles—is the true heir of the covenant. Murray contends that projecting these promises into a future, literal restoration of a Jewish nation and kingdom is a misunderstanding of biblical typology and fulfillment.

D. Interpretation of Prophecy

Murray emphasizes the need for context-sensitive and genre-aware interpretation of biblical prophecy. He critiques the strictly literal hermeneutic of dispensationalists, showing that the New Testament writers themselves often interpret Old Testament prophecies spiritually or typologically. For example, prophecies about Zion, the temple, or David's throne are frequently applied to Christ and the church, not to a future political state. Murray advocates allowing the New Testament to interpret the Old,

following the principle: "The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed." He warns that rigid literalism can lead to absurd or contradictory interpretations and that the true fulfillment of prophecy is found in Christ's person and work, not in national or material restoration.

E. The Second Coming of Christ

Murray affirms the historic Christian doctrine of the visible, bodily, and glorious return of Christ at the end of the age, as expressed in the Apostles' Creed and the teaching of the early church. He critiques the dispensationalist view of a two-stage coming (a secret rapture followed by a public return), arguing instead for a single, climactic event. The New Testament, he contends, consistently links Christ's return with the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment, not with the establishment of a temporary earthly kingdom. Murray also points out that the expectation of a future Jewish kingdom is absent from the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

F. The Millennium (Revelation 20)

A major battleground in eschatological debate is the interpretation of the "thousand years" in Revelation 20. Murray argues that this period is best understood symbolically, representing the present reign of the souls of departed saints with Christ in heaven. He points out that the book of Revelation is filled with symbols and should not be pressed into a rigidly literal mold. The "binding of Satan" refers to the restraint of his power during the gospel age, not to a future period of absolute inactivity. This reading aligns with the amillennial tradition, which sees the millennium as the current era between Christ's first and second comings, culminating in the final judgment and the new creation.

G. The Judgment and Resurrection

Murray strongly affirms the biblical teaching of a single, general resurrection and judgment at the end of the age. He critiques the dispensationalist scheme of multiple resurrections and judgments (for the church, Israel, the nations, etc.), showing that such distinctions are not found in the plain teaching of Scripture. Instead, Murray demonstrates that the New Testament consistently presents the resurrection and judgment as universal events, occurring at Christ's return, with all people—righteous and wicked—standing before God. Salvation and judgment are based on faith in Christ, not on ethnic or national identity.

H. The Testimony of Church History

Murray reviews the history of millennial thought in the church, showing that while some early church fathers held premillennial views, these were diverse, often fantastical, and not universally accepted. Premillennialism was never enshrined in the creeds and was largely set aside by the mainstream church after Augustine, who gave a decisive critique of literal millennialism. The revival of dispensational premillennialism in the 19th and 20th centuries is thus a modern development, not the historic faith of the church. Murray encourages readers not to base their beliefs on the supposed consensus of the early church but to return to the clear teaching of Scripture as interpreted in the light of Christ.

In summary, Murray's core argument is that Christian eschatology must be Christ-centered, gospel-driven, and rooted in the whole counsel of Scripture. He urges caution against speculative systems, calls for humility in doctrinal disagreements, and insists that the hope of the church is not in a future earthly kingdom but in the glorious return of Christ, the resurrection, and the new creation.

Testimony #10: Pink – The Application of the Scriptures: A Biblical Refutation of Dispensationalism (1952)

The Author: **Arthur W. Pink** (1886-1952) was English independent Baptist. Pink studied briefly at Moody Bible Institute before beginning pastoral work in Colorado. He later pastored churches in California, Kentucky, and South Carolina before moving on to preach and teach in Sydney, Australia. In 1934, he returned to his native England, moving to the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, in 1940, where he remained until his death in 1952. His monthly journal, *Studies in the Scriptures*, was published without interruption from 1922 to 1953, the remaining writings being printed after his death. Each issue of the Studies normally included six to eight expository articles. His writings are known for their clarity, zealous exhortation, careful exposition, and Christ-centeredness.[19]

The Book: " ***The Application of the Scriptures: A Biblical Refutation of Dispensationalism.***"[20] Arthur W. Pink's treatise aims to refute the system of Dispensationalism, which he describes as a modern error that wrongly divides Scripture and deprives Christians of much spiritual nourishment. Pink argues that all Scripture—Old and New Testament alike—is intended for the instruction, encouragement, and sanctification of believers, and not to be arbitrarily partitioned according to dispensational eras or peoples. He emphasizes the organic unity, doctrinal consistency, and spiritual applicability of the entire Bible to the Church today.

Core Topics and Ideas

A. The Unity of Scripture

Pink's foundational assertion is that the Bible, though diverse in its literary forms, historical contexts, and human authors, is ultimately a single, organically unified revelation from God. He stresses that the Scriptures do not present a fragmented or contradictory message but rather one consistent system of doctrine, one moral law,

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[19] https://www.chapellibrary.org/author/pinkarthurw

[20] Pink, Arthur W. *The Application of the Scriptures: A Biblical Refutation of Dispensationalism*, 1952

and one gospel for all ages. The unity of the Bible is rooted in its divine authorship: "Though He employed many mouthpieces, the Holy Scriptures have but one Author".

- **Doctrinal Consistency:** Pink points out that the Bible never refers to "doctrines of God" in the plural, but always "the doctrine," underscoring its singularity and coherence.
- **Salvation History:** From Genesis to Revelation, the way of salvation remains unchanged—by grace through faith in the Redeemer. Old Testament believers were saved, renewed, and made heirs of the same promises as New Testament Christians.
- **Moral Law:** The moral law revealed in Scripture is immutable, and its requirements remain consistent across both Testaments.

Pink uses analogies (the human body, the rainbow) to illustrate the interdependence and harmonious blending of the Bible's various parts, showing that division leads to destruction, not illumination.

B. Critique of Dispensationalism

Pink delivers a detailed critique of Dispensationalism, a theological system that divides biblical history into distinct eras ("dispensations") with different rules, promises, and recipients. He describes Dispensationalism as a "modern and pernicious error" that undermines the spiritual value of large portions of Scripture for the Church.

- **Misuse of 2 Timothy 2:15:** Dispensationalists often cite "rightly dividing the word of truth" as justification for partitioning the Bible. Pink argues that this is a misinterpretation; the verse refers to the preacher's responsibility to minister the Word appropriately to different spiritual conditions, not to segregate Scripture by dispensations.
- **Exclusion of Scripture:** Dispensationalists claim that much of the Old Testament, the Gospels, and certain Epistles are not for the Church but for Israel or a future "Jewish remnant." Pink refutes this, showing that the New Testament repeatedly draws from and applies the Old Testament to believers.
- **Practical Consequences:** Pink warns that such division leads to spiritual impoverishment, confusion, and a pharisaical spirit of superiority.

He also exposes inconsistencies in Dispensationalist teaching (e.g., Scofield's contradictory notes on law and grace in Matthew and Exodus) and demonstrates that their system is unworkable and unsupported by Scripture.

C. The Analogy of Faith and Application

The "Analogy of Faith" is a principle Pink emphasizes for interpreting and applying Scripture. It means that Scripture must be interpreted in light of itself—comparing passage with passage, and allowing the whole counsel of God to inform understanding.

- **Typology and Spiritual Fulfillment:** Pink shows that Old Testament terms (like "circumcision," "Israel," "idols," "mount Sion") are used in the New Testament with spiritual and antitypical meanings, applicable to the Church.
- **Transfer and Double Application:** He discusses how biblical language may be applied both literally and figuratively, and how promises and commands given to specific individuals or groups are often intended for all believers (e.g., the promise to Joshua in Joshua 1:5 is applied to all Christians in Hebrews 13:5).

Pink warns against making general what is particular, or restricting what is meant to be general, and insists that the proper application of Scripture is essential for sound doctrine and spiritual growth.

D. The Relationship of Law and Grace

Dispensationalism typically presents law and grace as mutually exclusive, with law belonging to the Old Testament and grace to the New. Pink refutes this dichotomy, arguing that law and grace are complementary aspects of God's character and dealings with humanity.

- **Law and Grace Throughout History:** Both operated in Eden, at Sinai, during the flood, and at Calvary. The law reveals God's righteousness and requirements; grace provides the means to fulfill them.
- **Salvation Always by Grace:** Pink demonstrates that, even under the Mosaic economy, salvation was by grace through faith, not by works. He cites Abel, Abraham, and David as examples of Old Testament saints justified by faith.
- **Practical Righteousness vs. Justification:** He distinguishes between practical righteousness (acceptable conduct before God) and justification (eternal standing before God), showing that both are applicable to all believers, regardless of era.

Pink insists that the law is not voided by faith but established and honored by the gospel, and that grace never annuls God's claims but enables believers to meet them.

E. The Promises of God

A central theme is the universality of God's promises. Pink contends that all promises—whether found in the Old or New Testament—are made to and fulfilled in Christ, and therefore belong to all who are in Him.

- **Children of the Promise:** Pink explains that the true heirs of God's promises are not the natural descendants of Abraham, but those who are spiritually united to Christ (Romans 9:8; Galatians 3:16, 29).
- **Typological Fulfillment:** Many Old Testament promises had both a literal and a spiritual significance, prefiguring the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant.
- **Personal Appropriation:** Believers are encouraged to lay claim to every promise, using them as motives for holiness, comfort, and assurance.

He provides numerous scriptural parallels to demonstrate that New Testament believers inherit the blessings promised to Israel, and that these promises are made effectual through Christ.

F. Practical Application of Scripture

Pink insists that the Bible is not merely a historical or doctrinal record but a living, personal message to every believer.

- **Personal Address:** Every command and promise should be appropriated as if God were speaking directly to the reader. This personal engagement is essential for spiritual growth, guidance, and sanctification.
- **Examples from Christ and Apostles:** Pink shows how Jesus and the apostles consistently applied Old Testament passages to the Church, setting a precedent for believers to do likewise.
- **Spirit's Application:** He concludes by emphasizing the need for the Holy Spirit to apply the Word to the heart, making it effectual for conviction, conversion, and daily living.

Pink's practical counsel is that believers should approach Scripture not as spectators but as participants, seeking to be instructed, corrected, and encouraged by every part of God's Word.

In conclusion, Pink's work stands as a robust defense of the continuity and universal applicability of all Scripture to the Church. He exposes the dangers of Dispensationalist teaching, urging believers to embrace the whole counsel of God, to appropriate every

promise and precept, and to walk in the fullness of biblical truth. The unity, harmony, and practical relevance of the Bible are essential for spiritual health and maturity.

Testimony #11: Ladd – The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture (1956)

The Author: **George Eldon Ladd** (1911-1982) was a Baptist minister and professor of New Testament theology and exegesis at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, known in Christian eschatology for his promotion of inaugurated eschatology and "futuristic post-tribulationism." Ladd was a notable modern proponent of historic premillennialism and often criticized dispensationalist views. This was notable during this period, as dispensationalism was by far the most widely held view among evangelicals during the mid-twentieth century.[21]

The Book: "***The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture.***"[22] In this book, George Eldon Ladd presents a thorough biblical and historical critique of the pretribulation rapture doctrine, arguing instead for a single, glorious return of Christ at the end of the Great Tribulation. Ladd maintains that the "Blessed Hope" of the Church is not a secret, pretribulation rapture, but the visible, triumphant second coming of Jesus Christ—a view rooted in early church history and the clear teachings of Scripture.

Core Topics and Ideas

1. Redemptive Purpose and the Second Coming

Ladd begins by placing the doctrine of Christ's return at the very heart of biblical redemption. Redemption, he argues, is not just about saving individual souls from the guilt and power of sin, but also about the ultimate transformation of both individuals (including the resurrection of the body) and society as a whole. The world, currently under the influence of Satan and marked by evil, suffering, and death, will not remain so indefinitely. God's redemptive plan is to culminate in the personal, visible, and glorious return of Jesus Christ, who will defeat evil, establish His kingdom, and bring

[21] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Eldon_Ladd

[22] Ladd, George E. *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture.* Eerdmans, 1956.

about a new era of peace and righteousness. This event is absolutely indispensable for the completion of God's work; without it, redemption is incomplete.

Ladd also emphasizes that the second coming is not only the hope of the individual Christian but the hope for all of humanity and creation. The knowledge of God will cover the earth, and the reign of Christ will bring justice and restoration.

2. Historical Development of Prophetic Views

Early Church

The earliest Christians did not believe in a pretribulation rapture. Their hope was the second coming of Christ after a period of tribulation, during which the Church would suffer persecution at the hands of the Antichrist. Early Christian documents such as the Didache, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the writings of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Lactantius, and Hippolytus all reflect a belief in a posttribulational return of Christ. They anticipated that the Church would endure suffering and that Christ would return in victory at the end of the age to defeat evil and resurrect the saints.

Middle Ages & Reformation

As Christianity became established, interpretations of prophecy shifted. The "historical" or "spiritual" approach became dominant, particularly after Augustine, who taught an "amillennial" view (that the millennium began with Christ's first coming and continues until His return). The Antichrist was often identified with the papacy, and the Tribulation was seen not as a future period but as a long era of church history. The Reformers largely continued this view, seeing the papacy as the fulfillment of Antichrist prophecies.

19th Century Onwards

A dramatic shift occurred in the 19th century with the rise of dispensationalism and the Plymouth Brethren, particularly through the influence of J.N. Darby. Darby and his followers introduced the idea of a "pretribulation rapture"—that Christ would come secretly to take the Church out of the world before a period of great tribulation (the "seventieth week" of Daniel). This view gained traction in America, especially through the Scofield Reference Bible and prophetic conferences, but was not universally accepted even among premillennialists. Many prominent leaders who initially accepted it later rejected it after further study.

3. Biblical Vocabulary and the Nature of Christ's Return

Ladd meticulously examines the New Testament vocabulary used to describe Christ's return:

- **Parousia** (coming, arrival, presence): Used to describe Christ's return as a single, visible event, not a secret or two-stage coming. It is associated with the resurrection of believers, the destruction of the Antichrist, and the gathering of the saints.
- **Apokalypsis** (revelation): Refers to the unveiling or revealing of Christ in glory, at which time believers receive their final redemption and reward. This is not a separate event from the parousia, but another aspect of the same event.
- **Epiphaneia** (manifestation): Again, this refers to the glorious appearing of Christ, which is the object of the believer's hope and coincides with the parousia and apokalypsis.

Ladd concludes that the New Testament never divides the second coming into two separate events (a secret rapture and a later public return). The vocabulary points consistently to a single, climactic event at the end of the age.

4. Evaluation of Pretribulation Arguments

Ladd critiques the main arguments used to support pretribulationism:

- **Scriptural Analysis:** Key passages (such as Matthew 24, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, and Revelation) do not teach a rapture before the Tribulation. Instead, the rapture and resurrection are consistently placed at Christ's return after the Tribulation. The Olivet Discourse, for example, describes the Church enduring tribulation and being gathered to Christ at His coming.
- **Pretribulationism as Inference:** The doctrine is not an explicit teaching of Scripture but rather an inference drawn from certain interpretations. Ladd argues that these inferences are not necessary and that alternative, more straightforward readings better fit the biblical data.
- **Watchfulness and Imminence:** The frequent biblical exhortations to "watch" and be ready do not imply an any-moment, signless rapture. Instead, they call for spiritual vigilance and readiness for Christ's return, which will be preceded by recognizable signs (such as the rise of Antichrist and the Great Tribulation).

5. Tribulation, Wrath, and the Church

A major argument for pretribulationism is that God will not allow His people to endure His wrath. Ladd agrees that believers are not destined for God's wrath but distinguishes between "tribulation" (which comes from the world and Satan) and "wrath" (which comes from God). The Church may experience persecution and tribulation, even during the time of Antichrist, but will be protected from God's final outpouring of wrath. This

distinction is crucial for a correct understanding of the Church's experience in the end times.

6. Dispensationalism and "Rightly Dividing the Word"

Dispensationalism, popularized by Darby and the Scofield Reference Bible, insists on a strict separation between Israel and the Church in biblical prophecy. Ladd challenges this approach, showing that Old Testament promises originally given to Israel (such as the outpouring of the Spirit in Joel or the New Covenant in Jeremiah) are applied to the Church in the New Testament. Therefore, it is unwarranted to claim that all prophecies about tribulation apply only to Israel and not to the Church. This method of "rightly dividing" the Word is inconsistent and not required by Scripture itself.

7. The Blessed Hope Defined

Ladd redefines the "Blessed Hope" as the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ, not as an escape from tribulation. The hope of the Church is union with Christ at His return, not the avoidance of suffering. He shows that the purifying influence of the Blessed Hope comes from the anticipation of being with Christ and being made like Him, not from the fear of being caught in sin at a secret, imminent rapture.

8. Practical and Theological Implications

- **Unity and Orthodoxy:** Ladd warns against making pretribulationism a test of orthodoxy or a ground for Christian fellowship. The essential doctrine is the personal, visible return of Christ, not the timing of the rapture. Christians should unite around the Blessed Hope, not divide over secondary details.
- **Missionary Motivation:** Ladd argues that the pretribulation doctrine can undermine the urgency of world evangelization, as it shifts the responsibility for global witness to a future "Jewish remnant." In contrast, the posttribulation view affirms that the Church's mission is to preach the gospel to all nations as a prerequisite for Christ's return, providing a powerful motivation for missions.
- **Preparation for Suffering:** Ladd cautions that teaching a guaranteed escape from tribulation may leave the Church unprepared for persecution. Faithful teaching should prepare believers for the possibility of suffering, as has been the experience of Christians throughout history.

To conclude, *The Blessed Hope* calls Christians to ground their eschatological expectations in the clear teaching of Scripture and the historic hope of the Church: the visible, victorious return of Christ. The pretribulation rapture, though popular in some circles, is a relatively modern inference not required by Scripture. The Church's true hope is not escape from tribulation, but the consummation of redemption in union with Christ at His coming. This doctrine should foster unity, spiritual readiness, and missionary zeal—not division or complacency.

Testimony #12: Sandeen – The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930 (1970)

The Author: **Ernest R. Sandeen** (1931-82) was the James Wallace Professor of History and codirector of the Living Historical Museum at Macalester College.[23]

The Book: "***The Roots of Fundamentalism***"[24] is a foundational study tracing the historical and theological development of fundamentalism, especially its roots in British and American millenarian (apocalyptic) thought from 1800 to 1930. The book is organized into thematic and chronological chapters, covering the revival and evolution of millenarianism, the rise of dispensationalism, the emergence of prophetic conferences, and the eventual crystallization of fundamentalist doctrine in the early 20th century. Sandeen emphasizes that fundamentalism is not merely a reactionary movement but has deep intellectual, organizational, and theological roots, particularly in millenarian traditions.

Core Topics and Ideas

A. Millenarianism and Its Revival

Definition and Historical Roots

- **Millenarianism** refers to the belief in a literal, imminent return of Christ to establish a thousand-year reign of peace and righteousness on earth (the millennium). This belief draws heavily on apocalyptic literature, especially the books of Daniel and Revelation, and has surfaced repeatedly in Christian history during times of crisis or upheaval.
- **Apocalypticism** is the broader worldview that sees history as a cosmic struggle between good and evil, culminating in divine intervention and final judgment.

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[23] https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B001HP1BW8/about

[24] Sandeen, Ernest R. *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930.* University of Chicago Press, 1970.

British Revival (1800–1845)

- The French Revolution and Napoleonic wars were interpreted by many British Christians as fulfillments of biblical prophecy, leading to a surge in prophetic speculation and study.
- Key Characteristics of the Revival:
    - Prophetic Study: Intense focus on interpreting biblical prophecy, especially the time periods and symbols in Daniel and Revelation. Literalist readings became the norm among revivalists.
    - **Restoration of the Jews:** Renewed interest in the literal return of the Jews to Palestine, seen as a necessary precursor to the Second Coming. Organizations like the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews were formed, blending evangelism with proto-Zionist sentiment.
    - **Premillennial Advent:** A shift from postmillennial optimism (the belief that the world would gradually improve before Christ's return) to a premillennial pessimism—expecting Christ's return before the millennium, and seeing the world as growing increasingly corrupt until that event.
    - **Conferences and Societies:** The Albury Conferences (1826–1828) and other gatherings helped consolidate millenarian thought, set doctrinal boundaries, and foster a sense of movement identity.

Sectarian and Social Impact

- Millenarianism often led to the formation of new sects or schisms within established denominations, as seen with the Irvingites and Plymouth Brethren.
- The movement was not merely theological but also social, providing a sense of urgency and mission in the face of perceived cultural and moral decline.

B. Transatlantic Transmission and American Adaptation

American Context and Native Strains

- **William Miller and Millerism:** In the early 19th century, American preacher William Miller independently developed a historicist premillennial system, predicting Christ's return in 1843–44. The movement attracted tens of thousands but collapsed after the "Great Disappointment," leaving a legacy of skepticism toward date-setting but not extinguishing millenarian hope.

- **American Millennialism and National Destiny:** From the Puritans onward, Americans often fused millennial expectations with national identity, seeing the United States as a "city on a hill" or a chosen nation with a role in God's redemptive plan. This fostered both utopian optimism (postmillennialism) and, after the Civil War, a more pessimistic premillennialism.

Obstacles and Reception

- The legacy of Millerism made American churches wary of millenarianism for decades. Only after 1845, and especially post-Civil War, did British-style premillennialism and dispensationalism gain traction in the US.
- **Diversity of Expression:** Millenarian ideas also found expression in new religious movements (Mormons, Shakers, Adventists), showing the adaptability and diversity of apocalyptic thought in America.

C. Dispensationalism and the Plymouth Brethren

Origins and Theological Innovations

John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren systematized a new approach to biblical prophecy called dispensationalism. Key features include:

- Division of History: Human history is divided into distinct "dispensations" or eras, each with its own divine economy and set of expectations.
- Distinction Between Israel and the Church: God's promises to Israel are not transferred to the Church; rather, Israel has a future role in prophecy, and the Church is a "parenthesis" in God's plan.
- Futurist Interpretation: Most prophecies in Daniel and Revelation are yet to be fulfilled, especially those concerning the end times.
- The Secret Rapture: The Church will be taken up ("raptured") before a period of tribulation, after which Christ returns visibly to establish the millennium.

Controversies and Schisms

- Dispensationalism was controversial even among millenarians, leading to schisms within the Brethren (e.g., Darby vs. Newton) and debates over the timing and nature of the rapture, the interpretation of prophetic texts, and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

American Reception

- Dispensationalism was imported to the US by Darby and his followers through preaching tours, literature, and the influence of key American leaders. It

gained particular traction through Bible conferences, prophetic charts, and later, the Scofield Reference Bible.

D. The Prophetic Conference Movement

Role and Function

- **Conferences as Hubs:** Prophecy and Bible conferences (e.g., Niagara, Mildmay, Northfield) became central to the spread and consolidation of millenarian and dispensationalist ideas, providing forums for teaching, networking, and organizing.
- **Doctrinal Statements:** These gatherings produced creeds and statements of faith that articulated the core beliefs of the movement, especially around biblical inerrancy, the second coming, and dispensational distinctives.

Community and Identity

- The conferences fostered a sense of "ecclesia" or spiritual community outside denominational structures, emphasizing lay participation, Bible reading, and separation from "apostate" churches.

Broader Impact

- The conference movement professionalized and institutionalized millenarianism, creating a network of periodicals, speakers, and Bible institutes that would shape the emerging fundamentalist movement.

E. Biblical Literalism and Princeton Theology

Literalist Hermeneutics

- Millenarian Literalism: Millenarians insisted on a "plain" or literal interpretation of prophetic scripture, rejecting allegorical or spiritualized readings as evasions or capitulations to modern skepticism.
- Debate Over Method: While literalism was a rallying cry, in practice even millenarians had to make interpretive judgments about which passages were literal and which were figurative, leading to debates and inconsistencies.

Princeton Theology

- **Systematization of Inerrancy:** The Princeton theologians (especially Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield) developed a rigorous doctrine of biblical inerrancy and verbal inspiration, arguing that the original manuscripts of scripture were without error in all that they affirmed.

- **Apologetic Purpose:** This doctrine was both a response to higher criticism and a means of shoring up Protestant orthodoxy against the perceived threats of modern science and skepticism.
- **Alliance with Millenarians:** The Princeton doctrine of scripture provided the intellectual and theological backbone for fundamentalism, while millenarian literalism provided the popular and prophetic energy.

F. The Fundamentals and the Fundamentalist Movement

Publication and Content

- **The Fundamentals** (1910–1915) was a series of twelve booklets funded by Lyman and Milton Stewart, distributed free to pastors, missionaries, and Christian workers. The essays covered:
  - Biblical inerrancy and inspiration
  - The deity, virgin birth, and atoning death of Christ
  - The bodily resurrection and return of Christ
  - The reality of miracles and the supernatural
  - The dangers of modernism, higher criticism, and other "heresies"

Alliance and Tensions

- The project brought together dispensationalists, Princeton theologians, and other conservative Protestants in a common cause, but also papered over significant differences (e.g., over eschatology, ecclesiology, and social engagement).
- The alliance was inherently unstable, and as the movement grew, internal tensions over doctrine, strategy, and engagement with the broader culture led to splits and the crystallization of "fundamentalism" as a distinct identity.

Organizational and Social Dynamics

- Fundamentalism was urban, organized, and media-savvy, with its own conferences, periodicals, Bible institutes, and denominational networks.
- It was not simply a reactionary or rural movement, but a self-conscious, structured, and enduring tradition that shaped much of 20th-century American evangelicalism.

G. Missiological and Social Vision

Evangelism and Missions

- Millenarians were deeply committed to world evangelization, but with a distinctive philosophy: they sought to "evangelize" (make the gospel available everywhere) rather than "convert the world," reflecting their apocalyptic expectations that the world would not be fully Christianized before Christ's return.
- This vision fueled the creation of Bible institutes, missionary societies, and independent "faith missions" (e.g., China Inland Mission), and shaped the strategy of the Student Volunteer Movement.

Social and Cultural Impact

- The movement's pessimism about culture and society led to a focus on individual conversion and separation from "apostate" denominations and secular society.
- At the same time, fundamentalists were active in creating alternative institutions—schools, publishing houses, conferences—that would sustain their vision and community.

In summary, Sandeen's work demonstrates that fundamentalism is best understood as the American expression of a transatlantic, millenarian, and dispensationalist movement, deeply invested in biblical literalism and eschatological expectation. It was an organized, intellectually serious, and enduring tradition, not simply a reactionary or anti-modernist impulse. The alliances, conferences, and creeds that defined early fundamentalism were the outgrowth of decades of theological development, organizational innovation, and social adaptation.

Testimony #13: Barr – Fundamentalism (1977)

The Author: James Barr (1924-2006) was a Scottish Old Testament scholar, known for his critique of the notion that the vocabulary and structure of the Hebrew language may reflect a particular theological mindset. At the University of Oxford, he was the Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture from 1976 to 1978, and the Regius Professor of Hebrew from 1978 to 1989. He was also an outspoken critic of conservative evangelicalism, which he attacked in his 1977 book Fundamentalism. In particular he criticised evangelical scholars such as J. I. Packer for affirming the doctrine of scriptural inerrancy, the teaching that the Bible is without error.[25]

The Book: "***Fundamentalism***"[26] is a critical and comprehensive analysis of the fundamentalist movement within Christianity, particularly Protestantism. Barr seeks to understand fundamentalism both as a religious and intellectual system and as a significant phenomenon in modern religious history. The book is not written as an attack on fundamentalists but rather as an exploration for the broader church, theology, and biblical studies communities, aiming to clarify the issues and assist those influenced by fundamentalist arguments to make informed decisions.

Core Topics and Structure

A. Definition and Nature of Fundamentalism

- **Opening Inquiry:** Barr begins by questioning whether "fundamentalism" can be precisely defined, arguing that it is better approached through extended description than simple definition.
- **Key Characteristics:** He identifies recurring traits, such as belief in biblical inerrancy, hostility to modern theology, and the tendency to exclude dissenters from being considered "true Christians".

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[25] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Barr_(biblical_scholar)
[26] Barr, James. *Fundamentalism.* SCM-Canterbury Press Ltd, 1977.

- **Terminology:** The debate over labels ("fundamentalist" vs. "conservative evangelical") is explored, with Barr noting the overlap and the social implications of these terms.

B. The Religious Basis and Historical Roots

- **Evangelical Revivals:** Barr traces fundamentalism's roots to the Evangelical Revivals, highlighting the experiential and conversionist core of the movement.
- **True vs. Nominal Christianity:** A central motif is the dichotomy between "true" and "nominal" Christians, which shapes the movement's self-understanding and attitudes toward others.
- **Organizational Manifestations:** The book describes the non-denominational, often para-church networks (such as student fellowships) through which fundamentalism operates, and the role of doctrinal purity in these organizations.

C. Fundamentalist Attitudes Toward the Bible

- **Literalism and Inerrancy:** Barr scrutinizes the claim that fundamentalists "take the Bible literally," showing that the real guiding principle is the avoidance of any admission of error in scripture.
- **Interpretive Techniques:** He details the oscillation between literal and non-literal readings, the use of harmonization to resolve apparent contradictions, and the philosophical and theological justifications for inerrancy.
- **Authority and Inspiration:** The arguments for biblical authority, including appeals to Jesus' and the apostles' views on scripture, are critically assessed.

D. Fundamentalism and Society

- **Science and Secularism:** Barr analyzes the relationship between fundamentalism and modern science, noting the movement's adaptation to scientific developments and the shift from outright opposition to strategic reinterpretation.
- **Social and Political Ethics:** The book explores fundamentalism's alignment with political conservatism, especially in the U.S., while also noting exceptions and complexities in other contexts.

- **Ecumenism and Denominationalism:** Fundamentalism's stance against ecumenical movements and its tendency to cut across denominational lines is discussed.

E. Conservative Biblical Scholarship

- **Rise of Conservative Scholarship:** Barr documents the growth of conservative academic output, such as commentaries and dictionaries, aimed at reassuring believers of the intellectual respectability of their views.
- **Methodological Tensions:** He distinguishes between "dogmatic" fundamentalism and "maximal conservatism"—the latter being conservative in conclusions but often using critical methods.
- **Selective Engagement:** The selective use of scholarship and the preference for literature that reinforces doctrinal security are analyzed.

F. Fundamentalism and Theology

- **Doctrine over Theology:** Barr argues that fundamentalism is characterized more by a handful of non-negotiable doctrines (inerrancy, virgin birth, deity of Christ) than by a comprehensive theological system.
- **Complacency and Lack of Self-Criticism:** The movement is portrayed as self-assured, with little engagement in constructive theological dialogue or openness to self-critique.
- **Relationship to Orthodoxy:** Barr critiques the claim that fundamentalism is the true heir of Christian orthodoxy, highlighting its selective appropriation and reinterpretation of tradition.

G. Variations, Conflicts, and Influence

- **Internal Diversity:** The book surveys variations within fundamentalism, such as Calvinism vs. Arminianism, millennialism, Pentecostalism, and attitudes toward modern Bible translations.
- **Impact on Evangelicalism:** Barr discusses how fundamentalist ideas have influenced wider evangelicalism, often blurring the lines between the two and shaping debates over biblical authority and interpretation.

H. Conclusion

Barr concludes that fundamentalism is a distinctive, modern, and problematic form of Christianity. Its intellectual and spiritual patterns are shaped by a defensive posture against modernity, resulting in a brittle doctrinal system and a distorted relationship to both scripture and tradition. While fundamentalism claims to preserve the faith, Barr argues that it in fact betrays the deeper religious concerns of evangelical Christianity and the broader church.

Testimony #14: Hoekema – The Bible and the Future (1979)

The Author: **Anthony A. Hoekema** (1913-1988) was a Dutch-American Calvinist minister and theologian. He attended Calvin College (A.B.), the University of Michigan (M.A.), Calvin Theological Seminary (Th.B.) and Princeton Theological Seminary (Th.D., 1953). After pastoring several Christian Reformed churches (1944–1956) he became Associate Professor of Bible at Calvin College (1956–1958). From 1958 to 1979, when he retired, he was Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.[27]

The Book: "***The Bible and the Future***"[28] is a comprehensive study of biblical eschatology—the doctrine of the last things. The book aims to present what the Bible teaches about the future, emphasizing that eschatology is not only about distant future events but also about present realities inaugurated by Christ. Hoekema adopts the perspective of "inaugurated eschatology," which sees the kingdom of God as both already present and yet to be fully realized. The book is divided into two main parts: Inaugurated Eschatology (present realities) and Future Eschatology (future events).

Main Topics and Core Ideas

1. Inaugurated Eschatology: The Present Reality of the Kingdom

A. Eschatology as Both Present and Future

Hoekema's foundational premise is that biblical eschatology is not merely about future events, but concerns realities already inaugurated by Christ's first coming. He carefully traces how both the Old and New Testaments are suffused with hope and expectation, but that the New Testament reveals that the "last days" have already begun in the person and work of Jesus.

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[27] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_A._Hoekema

[28] Hoekema, Anthony A. *The Bible and the Future*. Eerdmans, 1979.

Critique of Dispensationalism and Literalism

- Dispensationalism sharply distinguishes between the present church age and a future age of fulfillment for Israel, often relegating the kingdom of God to a distant, literal, earthly reign. Hoekema counters that the New Testament consistently presents the kingdom as already present in Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection, with its fullness yet to come. He rejects the notion of a postponed kingdom for Israel, arguing that such a view fails to recognize the continuity of God's redemptive plan.
- Evangelical Literalism tends to read prophetic and apocalyptic texts in a strictly literal way, missing the inaugurated, spiritual, and cosmic dimensions of the kingdom as revealed in the New Testament.

B. The Meaning of History

Hoekema offers a robust theology of history: history is linear, purposeful, and Christ-centered, not cyclical or meaningless. The coming of Christ is the central event, dividing history into the "old age" and the "age to come." The church now lives between Christ's first and second comings, participating in the blessings of the kingdom while awaiting its consummation.

Critique

- Dispensationalism's "parenthesis" view (that the church age is a temporary interruption in God's plan for Israel) is seen as a distortion of the biblical view of history. Hoekema insists on the unity of God's redemptive purpose across the ages.

C. The Kingdom of God

The kingdom is the central theme of Jesus' teaching. Hoekema demonstrates that Jesus and the apostles present the kingdom as both a present reality and a future hope. The kingdom is not merely a coming political regime for ethnic Israel, but God's dynamic reign in Christ, already at work in the world through the church .

Critique

- Dispensationalism insists on a literal, future, earthly kingdom for Israel, separate from the church. Hoekema refutes this, showing that the New Testament redefines the kingdom in Christological and spiritual terms, and that the church is the people of God, the inheritor of the promises.

- Literalism fails to see the typological and symbolic fulfillment of Old Testament kingdom prophecies in Christ and the church.

D. The Holy Spirit and Eschatology

The Holy Spirit is the eschatological gift, the "firstfruits" and "guarantee" of the age to come. The Spirit's presence means that believers already participate in the new creation but await its consummation.

Critique

- Dispensationalism often postpones the fullness of the Spirit's work to a future millennium, whereas Hoekema shows that Pentecost and the outpouring of the Spirit mark the present age as the age of eschatological fulfillment.

E. The "Already/Not Yet" Tension

The New Testament is characterized by a tension between what Christ has already accomplished and what is yet to be fulfilled. This tension shapes Christian life, hope, suffering, and mission.

Critique

- Dispensationalism and literalism tend to flatten this tension, either by over-futurizing (postponing fulfillment) or by over-literalizing (expecting a one-to-one correspondence between prophecy and future political events).

2. Future Eschatology: The Consummation

A. Individual Eschatology

Hoekema explores death, immortality, and the intermediate state. He rejects the Platonic idea of the soul's inherent immortality and instead emphasizes the biblical hope of resurrection—a holistic, bodily renewal.

Critique

- Literalism sometimes imports non-biblical (Greek philosophical) ideas about the soul's immortality, whereas Hoekema insists on the resurrection as the core of biblical hope.

B. Cosmic Eschatology

Hoekema surveys the Second Coming, the signs of the times, the millennium, resurrection, final judgment, and the new earth.

The Second Coming and the Signs of the Times

- Hoekema stresses the certainty of Christ's return, but warns against speculative date-setting and "reportorial eschatology"—the attempt to create detailed timetables from biblical prophecy.
- The "signs of the times" (gospel proclamation, tribulation, apostasy, antichrist, etc.) characterize the entire church age and intensify toward the end, but do not allow for precise predictions.
- Literalism reads the "signs" as literal, catastrophic events, often tied to current headlines, whereas Hoekema shows how these signs are ongoing features of the present age, not just the "end times".

Critique

- Dispensationalism divides the Second Coming into two phases (rapture and visible return) and claims no prophesied event needs to occur before the rapture ("imminence"). Hoekema rejects this, showing that the New Testament presents a single, climactic return of Christ and that the church will experience tribulation.

The Millennium

- Hoekema offers a critique of premillennialism and especially dispensational premillennialism, arguing for an amillennial view: the "millennium" is symbolic of the present reign of Christ, not a future, literal, earthly kingdom for Israel.
- He shows that the New Testament consistently interprets Old Testament millennial prophecies as fulfilled in Christ and the church, not postponed to a future Jewish age.

The New Earth

- The final state is not a disembodied heaven but the renewal of creation—"new heavens and a new earth"—where God's people dwell with him forever.

3. The Unity of God's Redemptive People

A. Israel and the Church

Hoekema strongly rejects the dispensationalist separation of Israel and the church. He demonstrates that the New Testament redefines Israel in terms of faith in Christ, that all believers—Jew and Gentile—are one people of God, and that the church is the heir to the promises made to Israel .

Critique

- Dispensationalism's future for ethnic Israel, involving a rebuilt temple, renewed sacrifices, and a separate kingdom, is shown to be contrary to the New Testament's teaching about the unity of God's people and the fulfillment of all promises in Christ.

4. The Purpose and Use of Prophecy

A. Prophecy as Proclamation, Not Timetable

Hoekema warns against using prophecy as a detailed blueprint for the future. Instead, prophecy is meant to call God's people to faith, hope, holiness, and readiness for Christ's return, not to satisfy curiosity or foster speculation.

Critique

- Dispensational and literalist approaches often treat prophecy as a "reportorial" or journalistic account of future events, leading to endless speculation and failed predictions. Hoekema insists that biblical prophecy is fulfilled in Christ and the church and is ultimately about Christ, not about reconstructing a detailed future chronology.

Summary of the Critique

Hoekema's work is a sustained, scholarly, and pastoral critique of dispensationalism and evangelical literalism:

- He demonstrates the unity of God's redemptive plan for Jew and Gentile, the spiritual and present reality of the kingdom, the symbolic and Christ-centered fulfillment of prophecy, and the dangers of speculative literalism.
- He offers a positive, Reformed, and Christ-centered eschatology that is rooted in biblical theology, the unfolding of redemptive history, and the inaugurated reality of the kingdom of God.

Testimony #15: Halsell – Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War (1986)

The Author: **Grace Halsell** (1923-2000) was an American journalist, author, and political commentator known for her immersive investigative reporting and critical works on race, religion, and international affairs. Born in Lubbock, Texas, Halsell had a diverse career that included work as a reporter, foreign correspondent, and speechwriter for President Lyndon B. Johnson. She was particularly recognized for her willingness to cross social and cultural boundaries—living as a Black woman, a Native American, and a Mexican migrant worker in America—to write firsthand accounts of marginalized experiences. Her work is noted for its depth, empathy, and critique of power structures, and she is remembered as a courageous writer who sought to give voice to the voiceless.[29]

The Book: "***Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War.***"[30] The book investigates the alliance between American evangelical fundamentalists and Israeli right-wing Zionists, exploring how religious prophecy, particularly the belief in an imminent nuclear Armageddon, shapes U.S. foreign policy, especially concerning Israel and the Middle East. Halsell draws on personal experiences, interviews, and extensive research to analyze the theological, political, and financial motivations behind this alliance and its potential global consequences.

Main Topics and Core Ideas

1. Evangelical Fundamentalism and Prophecy

Evangelical fundamentalism in the United States, particularly since the mid-20th century, has been marked by a literalist reading of the Bible, especially the prophetic books such as Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation. Many evangelicals believe that the Bible

[29] New York Times Obituary: "*Grace Halsell, 77, Author Who Lived the Stories She Wrote*," July 22, 2000.
[30] Halsell, Grace. *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War*. Lawrence Hill & Co., 1986.

predicts a specific sequence of end-times events, culminating in a catastrophic global conflict (Armageddon) centered in the Middle East, and specifically in Israel. This belief system, known as "Armageddon theology," holds that the return of Jews to Israel, the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, and a final, devastating war are all preordained steps before the Second Coming of Christ.

Evangelical leaders such as Hal Lindsey, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and others have popularized these ideas through best-selling books, television programs, and mass rallies. They interpret contemporary geopolitical events—such as wars in the Middle East, the rise of the European Union, and tensions with Russia—as direct fulfillments of biblical prophecy. This worldview not only shapes the religious outlook of millions of Americans but also influences their political choices, particularly regarding U.S. policy toward Israel and the Middle East.

2. Dispensationalism and Its Spread

Dispensationalism is a theological framework that divides history into distinct eras or "dispensations," each marked by different ways God interacts with humanity. Popularized in the U.S. by the Scofield Reference Bible, dispensationalism teaches that God has two separate plans: one for the Jewish people (Israel) and another for Christians.

According to dispensationalists, the modern state of Israel is a miraculous fulfillment of prophecy, and its existence is essential for the unfolding of God's plan. The belief system includes the idea of the "Rapture," in which born-again Christians will be taken up to heaven before a period of tribulation and war (including nuclear war), after which Christ will return to establish a millennial kingdom in Jerusalem. Dispensationalism has become deeply embedded in American evangelical culture through Bible colleges, seminaries, churches, and especially through the mass media influence of televangelists.

3. Political Influence and the U.S.-Israel Alliance

The fusion of dispensationalist theology with American patriotism has led to a powerful political movement that insists on unwavering support for Israel. Evangelical leaders have mobilized their followers to lobby Congress, support pro-Israel policies, and oppose any pressure on Israel to withdraw from occupied territories or compromise with Palestinians.

This political influence is not just theoretical—it is reflected in billions of dollars in annual U.S. aid to Israel, the shaping of public opinion, and the election of politicians who pledge loyalty to Israel. Evangelicals argue that supporting Israel is a biblical

mandate, often citing Genesis 12:3 ("I will bless those who bless you...") as a divine command with direct consequences for America's fate.

4. The Alliance: A Marriage of Convenience

Despite significant theological differences (evangelicals ultimately believe Jews must convert or perish in the end times), a pragmatic alliance has formed between American evangelical leaders and Israeli right-wing Zionists. For Israel, the alliance delivers political, financial, and grassroots support from a large segment of the U.S. population. For evangelicals, supporting Israel is seen as advancing God's prophetic plan and ensuring personal and national blessing.

Many Jewish leaders are aware of the conditional nature of evangelical support but accept it for its practical benefits. Some, like Irving Kristol and Nathan Perlmutter, openly advocate for prioritizing political support for Israel over concerns about the domestic or theological agenda of evangelical allies.

5. Consequences for Palestinians and Christians in the Holy Land

A central critique in Halsell's work is how this alliance renders Palestinians—both Muslim and Christian—invisible or irrelevant to American evangelicals and policymakers. Christian tours to Israel, often organized by evangelical churches or ministries, typically avoid contact with Palestinian communities, instead focusing exclusively on Jewish and biblical sites.

This erasure has real-world consequences: the displacement of Palestinians, the decline of indigenous Christian communities, and the perpetuation of a narrative that denies Palestinian history and suffering. Palestinian Christians, in particular, feel betrayed by their Western co-religionists, who support policies that contribute to their marginalization and exodus from the Holy Land.

6. Militarism, Nuclear Weapons, and the Threat of Catastrophe

Halsell draws attention to the dangerous implications of an apocalyptic worldview in a nuclear-armed age. If millions of Americans—and key policymakers—believe that nuclear war is not only inevitable but divinely mandated, this undermines efforts toward peace, arms control, and environmental stewardship.

She documents how this belief system has influenced U.S. leaders, including Ronald Reagan, who reportedly interpreted world events through the lens of biblical prophecy and was skeptical of arms control with the Soviet Union. The book warns that such attitudes could increase the risk of actual nuclear conflict, especially if religious leaders

and politicians see war as a means to fulfill prophecy rather than a tragedy to be avoided.

In summary, Halsell's book offers a comprehensive critique of the intersection between evangelical prophecy, American politics, and Israeli nationalism. It exposes the theological, political, and financial motivations behind the U.S.-Israel alliance, highlights the erasure of Palestinians, and warns of the existential dangers posed by apocalyptic thinking in the nuclear age.

Testimony #16: Boyer – When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture (1992)

The Author: **Paul Samuel Boyer** (1935-2012) was a U.S. cultural and intellectual historian (Ph.D., Harvard University, 1966) and Merle Curti Professor of History Emeritus and former director (1993–2001) of the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He had held visiting professorships at UCLA, Northwestern University, and William & Mary; had received Guggenheim Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation Fellowships; and was an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Society of American Historians, and the American Antiquarian Society.[31]

The Book: "***When Time Shall Be No More***"[32] is a comprehensive exploration of prophecy belief—particularly apocalyptic and millennialist traditions—within modern American culture. The book traces the historical roots, cultural prevalence, and social consequences of prophecy belief, with a special focus on the post-World War II era and the Cold War. Boyer argues that prophecy belief is far more central to American thought and public life than is often recognized, influencing attitudes toward politics, international affairs, technology, and social change.

Core Topics and Structure

The book is organized both chronologically and thematically, providing a sweeping examination of prophecy belief—especially dispensational premillennialism and literalist interpretations—within the context of American history and culture. Below is an expanded look at the book's core topics and structure, with key themes and representative content from each section.

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[31] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Boyer_(historian)

[32] Boyer, Paul S. *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. Harvard University Press, 1992.

1. Historical Genesis and Evolution of Prophecy Belief

A. Ancient and Biblical Roots

- **Jewish and Early Christian Apocalypticism:** Boyer begins by tracing the origins of apocalyptic literature in the Jewish and early Christian traditions, focusing on texts such as Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation. He examines how these works introduced themes of cosmic struggle, final judgment, and the expectation of a decisive, divinely orchestrated end of history.
- **Interpretive Traditions:** The book discusses how these texts were interpreted allegorically, historically, or literally by theologians from Augustine to Joachim of Fiore, and how apocalypticism was woven into the fabric of medieval and early modern Christianity.

B. Prophecy in the Reformation and Early America

- **Reformation-Era Developments:** Boyer analyzes how the Protestant Reformation reinvigorated apocalyptic speculation, with figures like Martin Luther identifying the Pope as Antichrist and interpreting contemporary events through a prophetic lens.
- **Colonial and Revolutionary America:** The book details how prophecy belief migrated to the New World, with Puritans and later American religious leaders viewing their own history as part of a cosmic, prophetic drama. Apocalyptic themes were invoked during crises such as the American Revolution and the Civil War, often blending religious and patriotic motifs.

2. The Rise and Transformation of Dispensational Premillennialism

A. Nineteenth-Century Developments

- **Millerism and the Great Disappointment:** Boyer explores the Millerite movement, its failed date-setting for the Second Coming, and the subsequent caution it instilled in prophecy circles.
- **Dispensationalism's Emergence:** The book covers the rise of dispensational premillennialism, especially as articulated by John Nelson Darby and popularized through the Scofield Reference Bible. This system divided history into distinct "dispensations," predicted the Rapture, Tribulation, and literal Millennium, and emphasized a literalist, future-oriented reading of prophecy.

B. Cultural and Institutional Entrenchment

- **Spread through Evangelical Networks:** Dispensationalism gained a foothold in Bible conferences, evangelical seminaries, denominational publications, and mass-market religious media. Boyer highlights the role of institutions like Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary in shaping generations of prophecy expositors.
- **Popularization and Mass Culture:** The genre's accessibility, reliance on charts and visual aids, and use of contemporary events to illustrate prophetic "fulfillment" helped it reach a vast audience, especially through paperbacks, radio, and later television.

3. Key Themes in Modern (Post-WWII) Prophecy Belief

A. The Cold War and Nuclear Age

- **Russia as "Gog" and the Nuclear Apocalypse:** Boyer details how the Soviet Union was cast as the biblical "Gog," destined to invade Israel and be destroyed in a nuclear holocaust. He explores how prophecy writers interpreted atomic weapons, the arms race, and global crises as fulfillments of biblical prediction.
- **Israel and the Middle East:** The founding of the State of Israel in 1948 was seen as a pivotal prophetic event, confirming dispensationalist expectations and fueling further interest in end-times scenarios.

B. Prophecy and American Public Life

- **Influence on Politics and Foreign Policy:** Boyer examines how prophecy belief shaped American attitudes toward the Soviet Union, the Middle East, and nuclear policy. He documents the engagement of public figures (e.g., Ronald Reagan) with prophecy themes and the reciprocal influence between religious and political rhetoric.
- **Mass Media and Popular Culture:** The book explores the proliferation of prophecy themes in bestsellers (e.g., Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*), movies, music, and televangelism, showing how prophecy belief became a pervasive feature of American popular culture.

4. The Enduring Appeal and Social Consequences of Prophecy Belief

A. Psychological and Social Functions

- **Meaning-Making in Crisis:** Boyer analyzes how apocalyptic belief provides psychological comfort and a sense of order, particularly during periods of upheaval (e.g., wars, social unrest, technological change.
- **Tension Between Fatalism and Activism:** The book discusses the paradox that prophecy belief can foster both political passivity (a sense that events are foreordained and inevitable) and, at times, activism (efforts to "hasten" or prepare for the end.

B. Critique, Adaptation, and Decline?

- **Criticism from Within and Without:** Boyer notes the critiques of prophecy belief from liberal theologians, secular commentators, and even some evangelicals, especially regarding its political implications and potential for fatalism or escapism.
- **Adaptability and Resilience:** Despite predictions of decline, prophecy belief has repeatedly adapted to new circumstances—reinterpreting world events and incorporating technological and political changes into its narrative framework.

In summary, Boyer's work demonstrates that prophecy belief is not an isolated or eccentric phenomenon but a dynamic, adaptable, and influential part of American culture. Its impact is visible not only in religious life but also in politics, foreign policy, popular culture, and the broader worldview of millions of Americans. The book calls for greater scholarly and public attention to the ways in which apocalyptic thinking shapes responses to contemporary challenges—and to the enduring human need for meaning in the face of uncertainty and change

Testimony #17: Wagner – Anxious for Armageddon: A Call to Partnership for Middle East Peace (1995)

The Author: **Donald E. Wagner** is an American theologian, Presbyterian minister, educator, and activist renowned for his expertise on Christian Zionism, Middle Eastern Christianity, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He has served as a professor of Middle Eastern Studies at North Park University in Chicago and was the founding director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies there. Wagner is also a co-founder and former executive director of Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding (EMEU), an organization dedicated to fostering dialogue and partnership between Western and Middle Eastern Christians. He has worked extensively with ecumenical and interfaith organizations, including Mercy Corps International, and has been deeply involved in advocacy for justice, peace, and human rights in the Middle East.[33]

The Book: "***Anxious for Armageddon***"[34] explores the complex interplay of religion, politics, and identity in the Middle East, focusing on the relationship between Western Christians—especially evangelicals—and Middle Eastern Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Wagner's central concern is the urgent need for justice, reconciliation, and partnership, rather than triumphalism or one-sided support, particularly in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The book is structured as a personal and theological journey, blending memoir, biblical analysis, historical review, and practical advocacy.

Core Topics and Ideas

a. Christian Zionism and Dispensationalism

- Wagner devotes significant attention to the rise and impact of Christian Zionism, which is rooted in dispensationalist theology and evangelical literalism. He traces its origins from early British interpretations of prophecy,

[33] https://www.simonandschuster.com/authors/Donald-E-Wagner/192115094
[34] Wagner, Donald E. *Anxious for Armageddon: A Call to Partnership for Middle Eastern and Western Christians*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995.

through figures like Thomas Brightman and John Nelson Darby, to its flourishing in American evangelicalism.

- Dispensationalism divides biblical history into distinct eras or "dispensations" and interprets prophecy as a literal, predictive roadmap for current and future events. This leads to the belief that the return of Jews to Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel are direct fulfillments of biblical prophecy, setting the stage for the Second Coming and Armageddon.
- Wagner critiques this framework for misreading scripture, prioritizing future-oriented, apocalyptic scenarios over the Bible's core ethical teachings on justice, mercy, and reconciliation. He shows how dispensationalism often leads Western Christians to support Israeli policies uncritically, viewing the modern state as a sacred entity and ignoring the suffering of Palestinians—including fellow Christians.
- The book details how Christian Zionist organizations, such as the International Christian Embassy-Jerusalem (ICEJ), have become influential in shaping Western (especially American) policy and public opinion, often acting in ways that undermine the witness and well-being of indigenous Middle Eastern Christians.

b. The Experience and Plight of Middle Eastern Christians

Wagner brings to light the often-ignored reality of indigenous Arab Christians in Palestine/Israel and the broader Middle East.

- He describes these Christians as the "living stones"—the direct spiritual and historical descendants of the earliest followers of Jesus, whose presence predates both Islam and modern Zionism.
- These communities are caught in the crossfire: marginalized by the Israeli state, often mistrusted by Muslim neighbors, and neglected or misunderstood by Western Christians who are more focused on prophecy or political alliances than on the lived realities of local believers.
- Wagner documents the shrinking numbers of Christians due to emigration, economic hardship, and political pressure, warning of the risk that Christianity in the land of its birth may become a "museum piece" if current trends continue.
- He calls for solidarity, partnership, and support from Western Christians—not as patrons, but as equals—urging them to listen to the voices and needs of Middle Eastern Christians.

c. Justice, Reconciliation, and Biblical Mandate

Central to Wagner's argument is the biblical imperative for justice and reconciliation.

- Drawing from both Old and New Testaments, he insists that God's covenant with Israel was always intended to bless "all the families of the earth" and that faithfulness to God is measured not by possession of land or ritual, but by the practice of justice, mercy, and humility.
- He critiques the use of the Bible as a tool for justifying violence, occupation, or exclusion, arguing that such readings invert the true message of scripture and turn God into a "cosmic real estate agent."
- Wagner, echoing prophetic voices and the teachings of Jesus, insists that the Christian calling is to stand with the oppressed, seek the liberation of both oppressed and oppressor, and work for reconciliation—not vengeance or triumphalism.
- He emphasizes that liberation and justice are not optional for Christians, but are at the very heart of the gospel, and that the church must be a prophetic voice for peace based on justice, not merely a supporter of power.

d. Historical Context: Colonialism, Zionism, and the Palestinian Catastrophe

Wagner provides a detailed account of how Western colonialism, Christian Zionism, and political Zionism converged to shape the modern Middle East.

- He describes the British Mandate era, the Balfour Declaration, and the various secret agreements and betrayals that led to the dispossession of Palestinians and the creation of the refugee crisis.
- The book explores the Nakba (catastrophe) of 1948, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled or fled from their homes, and the ongoing strategies of land confiscation, settlement, and denial of Palestinian rights.
- Wagner argues that these events were not accidental, but the result of deliberate policies—often justified with religious language—by both Western powers and Zionist leaders, with devastating consequences for Palestinians, including Christians.

e. The Shrinking Church and the Challenge of Survival

A major theme is the **demographic and existential crisis facing Middle Eastern Christians.

- Wagner documents the rapid decline in the Christian population in cities like Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Ramallah, attributing it to political instability, economic hardship, discriminatory policies, and a lack of support from the global church.
- He warns that if these trends continue, Christianity in its birthplace risks extinction, and with it, the hope for pluralism, reconciliation, and a living witness to the gospel in the region.
- The book calls for urgent action: practical support, advocacy, and genuine partnership with local churches, to help them survive and thrive amid immense challenges.

f. The Role and Responsibility of Western Christians

Wagner's message to Western Christians is clear: **move beyond triumphalism, literalism, and political partisanship.

- He urges Western Christians to educate themselves about the realities of the Middle East, to listen to and support local Christian communities, and to advocate for policies rooted in international law and human rights.
- The book critiques Western missionary models that ignore or undermine indigenous churches, calling for a new paradigm of partnership, respect, and mutual learning.
- Wagner emphasizes the need for interfaith dialogue, peacemaking, and prophetic witness—not just for the sake of Middle Eastern Christians, but as a test of the authenticity of the church's faith and mission in the world.

In summary, the book's core topics and ideas revolve around a deep critique of the theological and political frameworks that have shaped Western Christian attitudes toward the Middle East, a passionate plea for justice and reconciliation, and a call for genuine partnership with the "living stones"—the indigenous Christians of the region. Wagner insists that the future of Christianity in the Holy Land, and the prospects for peace, depend on a radical reorientation of theology, politics, and practice among Western Christians.

Testimony #18: Friedman – Who Wrote the Bible? (1997)

The Author: **Richard Elliott Friedman** is an American biblical scholar, theologian, and translator who currently serves as the Ann and Jay Davis Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Georgia. He attended the University of Miami (BA, 1968), the Jewish Theological Seminary (MHL, 1971), and Harvard University (Th.M. in Hebrew Bible, 1974; Th.D. in Hebrew Bible and Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1978).[35]

The Book: "***Who Wrote the Bible?***"[36] explores the complex question of the authorship of the Hebrew Bible, especially the Pentateuch (the first five books, traditionally ascribed to Moses). The book synthesizes centuries of critical scholarship and presents the Documentary Hypothesis, which posits that the Pentateuch is a composite work created by combining several distinct sources, each with its own perspective, history, and agenda. Friedman aims to make academic biblical scholarship accessible to a wider audience, explaining why understanding the Bible's origins matters for both religious and secular readers.

Main Topics and Core Ideas

1. The Documentary Hypothesis: A Patchwork Text

At the heart of Friedman's book is the Documentary Hypothesis, the theory that the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) is not the work of a single author, but rather a composite text assembled from multiple sources over centuries. This hypothesis, developed by generations of scholars, is supported by a wealth of internal evidence: duplicate stories (doublets), contradictions, variations in vocabulary and style, and sudden shifts in theological perspective.

Friedman identifies four primary sources:

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[35] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Elliott_Friedman

[36] Friedman, Richard E. *Who Wrote the Bible, 2nd Ed*. HarperCollins, 1997.

- **J (Yahwist):** Likely composed in the southern kingdom of Judah, this source uses the divine name Yahweh, depicts God in anthropomorphic terms, and reflects the concerns and traditions of the Judean monarchy. J emphasizes the line of David and the centrality of Judah.
- **E (Elohist):** Written in the northern kingdom of Israel, E uses Elohim for God, focuses on prophecy, and often elevates Moses at the expense of Aaron. E is critical of the southern monarchy and priesthood and reflects the political and religious rivalries between Israel and Judah.
- **D (Deuteronomist):** Associated with the book of Deuteronomy and the historical books Joshua through Kings, D reflects the centralizing religious reforms of King Josiah in the 7th century BCE. It emphasizes covenant fidelity, collective responsibility, and a theology of reward and punishment based on obedience to the law.
- **P (Priestly):** Produced by the Aaronid priesthood in Jerusalem, P is concerned with ritual, genealogy, purity, and the centrality of the Temple. P presents a transcendent, orderly God and codifies the role of the priesthood. P is also characterized by a systematic, almost bureaucratic attention to detail and order.

These sources were not simply placed side by side; they were intricately woven together by later editors (redactors), who sometimes left contradictions and doublets in place, and sometimes harmonized or altered the texts to suit new theological or political agendas.

2. The Historical Context: Politics, Priesthood, and Power

Friedman's analysis situates each source within its historical context, showing how the composition and editing of the biblical texts were profoundly shaped by political events and social change. The rivalry between the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah), the rise and fall of dynasties, the Assyrian conquest, the Babylonian exile, and the eventual return under Persian rule all left their mark on the Bible.

For example, the Deuteronomist's emphasis on covenant and centralization reflects Josiah's attempt to unite the people around a single religious center in Jerusalem, at a time when Assyrian power was waning and the prospect of national renewal seemed possible. The Priestly source, on the other hand, reflects the concerns of the Aaronid priesthood during or after the reforms of Hezekiah, when the centralization of worship and the exclusion of rival priestly lines became paramount.

Friedman also traces the process by which these sources were eventually combined, arguing that the final redaction likely occurred in the Second Temple period, possibly under the leadership of Ezra. Ezra, an Aaronid priest and scribe, had both the authority

and motivation to unify the various traditions into a single, authoritative Torah—a Torah that would serve as the foundation for Jewish identity in the post-exilic world.

3. The Bible as a Human and Divine Work

A crucial theme in Friedman's book is the recognition that the Bible is both a human and a divine work. While the text is inspired and remains a source of spiritual and moral guidance, it is also a product of human hands—of priests, scribes, prophets, and kings, each with their own perspectives, interests, and limitations. This recognition does not diminish the Bible's value; rather, it enriches our understanding and appreciation of its complexity, depth, and enduring power.

4. Implications for Authenticity, Reliability, and Inerrancy

a. Authenticity and Reliability

Friedman's findings have profound implications for how we understand the authenticity and reliability of the Bible. The recognition that the Pentateuch is a composite work, assembled from multiple sources with differing agendas, undermines the notion of a single, unbroken, divinely dictated narrative. Instead, the Bible emerges as a tapestry of voices—sometimes harmonious, sometimes in tension—reflecting the evolving faith, politics, and experiences of ancient Israel and Judah.

This does not mean that the Bible is devoid of historical truth or spiritual insight. Rather, it means that its reliability must be assessed with an awareness of its literary and editorial complexity. Some stories may be rooted in historical memory, while others are theological or political constructs designed to address the needs and crises of specific communities. The Bible's value lies not in its literal accuracy, but in its ability to speak to the deepest questions of human existence across time and culture.

b. The Doctrine of Inerrancy

Perhaps no doctrine is more directly challenged by Friedman's work than the doctrine of inerrancy. Inerrancy—the belief that the Bible is without error in all it affirms—rests on the assumption of a unified, divinely orchestrated text. The presence of contradictions, doublets, and editorial seams cannot be explained away as mere apparent discrepancies or copyist errors; they are integral to the text itself and arise from its composite nature.

For example, the differing accounts of the creation and flood, the contradictory laws regarding sacrifice and priesthood, and the shifting boundaries of the land promised to Israel all point to a text that is the product of negotiation, revision,

and compromise. Attempts to harmonize every detail or to insist on a literal, error-free Bible are at odds with the evidence of its complex composition.

Instead, Friedman's work invites a more nuanced view: the Bible is both a divine and human product, containing inspired insights but also shaped by the limitations and agendas of its authors and editors. Faith in the Bible need not rest on the denial of its human origins; rather, it can be enriched by a deeper appreciation for the ways in which God speaks through the diversity, struggle, and creativity of the biblical tradition.

5. Challenges to Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and Evangelical Literalism

Dispensationalism: Dispensationalism divides biblical history into distinct eras ("dispensations"), each governed by a unique set of divine laws and arrangements. It is built upon the assumption of a unified, divinely revealed Mosaic Law and a literal, predictive approach to prophecy. Friedman's findings pose several challenges to this framework:

- **No Single Mosaic Law:** The Torah is not a single, unified code, but a compilation of often competing legal traditions. The very notion of "the Law of Moses" as a monolithic, timeless standard is called into question by the presence of multiple sources, each with its own version of laws, rituals, and priestly roles.
- **Prophecy as Redaction:** Many "prophecies" are shown to be retrospective editorial insertions or reinterpretations, rather than straightforward predictions. For example, the prophecy about King Josiah in 1 Kings 13:2 is widely recognized as a later addition, crafted to legitimize Josiah's reforms rather than as a genuine prediction.
- **Artificial Periodization:** The dispensationalist division of history into clear-cut eras is complicated by the Bible's own evidence of gradual development, overlapping traditions, and ongoing theological debate.

Christian Zionism: Christian Zionism often relies on a literal reading of biblical promises regarding the land of Israel and the Jewish people. Friedman's analysis complicates this reading in several ways:

- **"Israel" is Not Monolithic:** The term "Israel" in the Bible refers to different entities at different times—sometimes the united monarchy, sometimes the northern kingdom, sometimes the people as a whole—each with its own agenda and theological outlook. The boundaries and nature of the land

promises shift depending on the source and historical context, reflecting the interests of different priestly and political factions.

- **Land Promises as Editorial Constructs:** The land promises are not uniform, but are shaped and reshaped by successive generations of authors and editors. What is presented as a divine promise in one context may be reinterpreted or reconfigured in another, challenging the idea of a single, unchanging divine mandate for the land.
- **Modern Application is Problematic:** The attempt to draw a straight line from ancient promises to modern political realities is rendered problematic by the Bible's own internal diversity and complexity.

Evangelical Literalism: Evangelical literalism assumes that the Bible can and should be read as a straightforward, inerrant account of history and doctrine. Friedman's findings challenge this assumption on several fronts:

- **Multiplicity of Meanings:** The Bible contains multiple, sometimes conflicting, "plain meanings" depending on which source or tradition is being read. For example, the creation accounts in Genesis 1 (P) and Genesis 2 (J) present different sequences and theological emphases.
- **Literary and Historical Complexity:** The text's contradictions, doublets, and evolving theology require a more sophisticated, literary, and historical approach to interpretation. Literalism, by insisting on a single, harmonized meaning, ignores the richness and depth of the biblical tradition.
- **Limits of "Plain Sense":** The idea that the Bible's "plain sense" is always clear and authoritative is complicated by the recognition that the text often contains multiple, even conflicting, "plain senses." Instead, responsible interpretation requires attention to genre, historical context, and the editorial process.

6. Broader Theological and Spiritual Implications

Friedman's work does not simply pose problems for traditional doctrines; it also offers new possibilities for faith and interpretation:

- **Humility and Openness:** Recognizing the Bible's human and historical dimensions can foster greater humility, openness to dialogue, and flexibility in theological interpretation. It encourages believers to approach the text with curiosity, honesty, and a willingness to wrestle with its complexities.

- **Faith Beyond Literalism:** For many, faith need not rest on the literal inerrancy of the text, but can be rooted in the Bible's enduring spiritual, ethical, and literary power—understood in the context of its origins and development. The Bible's value lies not in its perfection, but in its capacity to speak to the deepest questions of human existence, to inspire hope, and to call us to justice, compassion, and love.
- **A Living Tradition:** The Bible is not a static artifact, but a living tradition—a record of the ongoing conversation between God and God's people, shaped by the joys and sorrows, triumphs and failures, of generations past. Engaging with the Bible as a dynamic, evolving text can deepen our faith and enrich our understanding.

Conclusion

Richard Elliott Friedman's Who Wrote the Bible? is a transformative work that invites readers to see the Bible with new eyes. Its core argument—that the Bible is a composite work, shaped by centuries of human creativity, conflict, and faith—has profound implications for how we read, interpret, and live with this ancient text. While it challenges doctrines of inerrancy, literalism, and simplistic historical readings, it also opens the door to a richer, more honest engagement with the Bible as a living document. For those willing to embrace its complexity, the Bible remains a source of wisdom, inspiration, and awe—not because it is free of human fingerprints, but because it so powerfully bears witness to the human search for God.

Testimony #19: Sproul – The Last Days According to Jesus: When Did Jesus Say He Would Return (1998)

The Author: **Robert Charles Sproul** (1939-2017) was an American Reformed theologian, Christian apologist, and ordained pastor in the Presbyterian Church in America. He was the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries. He obtained degrees from Westminster College, Pennsylvania (BA, 1961), Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (MDiv, 1964), the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (Drs., 1969), and Whitefield Theological Seminary (PhD, 2001). He taught at numerous colleges and seminaries, including Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando and in Jackson, Mississippi, and Knox Theological Seminary in Ft. Lauderdale.[37]

The Book: "***The Last Days According to Jesus***"[38] addresses one of the most debated questions in Christian theology: When did Jesus say He would return? The book investigates Jesus's prophecies about the "last days," especially those found in the Olivet Discourse, and examines how these prophecies have been interpreted historically and in modern times. Sproul aims to clarify the time-frame references in Jesus's eschatological teachings and to defend the credibility of both Jesus and the New Testament against charges of failed prophecy, particularly those raised by critics like Bertrand Russell and scholars of "consistent eschatology."

Main Topics and Core Ideas

a. The Olivet Discourse and Time-Frame References

The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) is the central teaching of Jesus about the "last days." Sproul examines Jesus's statements about the destruction of the temple, the coming of the Son of Man, and the end of the age. A key focus is on Jesus's phrase, "this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place." Critics like Bertrand Russell use this statement to argue that Jesus was mistaken about

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[37] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._C._Sproul

[38] Sproul, R.C. *The Last Days According to Jesus. When Did Jesus Say He Would Return?* Baker Books, 1998 (A New Edition in 2015).

the timing of His return, since the visible, global return did not occur within the lifetime of His contemporaries.

Sproul carefully analyzes the discourse, noting that the disciples' questions and Jesus's answers are closely tied to the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. He explores whether "all these things" refers only to the destruction of Jerusalem or also includes the parousia (coming) of Christ. This analysis leads to a discussion of how to interpret time-frame indicators in the New Testament—terms like "soon," "at hand," and "this generation"—and whether they should be taken at face value or reinterpreted in light of subsequent events.

b. The Crisis in Eschatology

Sproul traces how the issue of "parousia-delay" (the delay of Christ's return) became a major crisis for Christian theology, especially from the Enlightenment onward. The rise of rationalism and higher criticism led many scholars to question the reliability of the New Testament, especially regarding prophecy. Nineteenth-century liberalism, influenced by Hegelian philosophy and evolutionary views of religion, sought to "desupernaturalize" Christianity and reinterpret the kingdom of God as an ethical or social ideal rather than a supernatural, future event.

Scholars such as Albert Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss argued that Jesus and His followers expected an imminent, catastrophic end of the world, which did not occur—thus, they claimed, Jesus's eschatology was "unrealized." This "crisis" led to various attempts to resolve the tension between the New Testament's imminent language and the ongoing reality of history. Some, like C.H. Dodd, developed the idea of "realized eschatology," arguing that the kingdom arrived spiritually in Jesus's ministry, while others, like Oscar Cullmann and Herman Ridderbos, introduced the "already/not yet" framework, balancing present fulfillment with future consummation.

c. Preterism vs. Futurism

A major theme of the book is the debate between Preterism and Futurism:

- Preterism holds that most or all New Testament prophecies about the "last days" were fulfilled in the first century, especially with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.
    - Radical (Full) Preterism: Claims that all eschatological events—including the return of Christ, the resurrection, and the final judgment—have already occurred in a spiritual or symbolic sense.
    - Moderate (Partial) Preterism: Argues that many prophecies were fulfilled in the first century (notably those concerning Jerusalem's

destruction), but that some key events (the final return of Christ, the bodily resurrection, and the last judgment) remain future.

- Futurism interprets these prophecies as referring primarily to events that are still to come at the end of world history, such as a future great tribulation, a personal Antichrist, and the second coming of Christ in glory.

Sproul aligns with moderate preterism, emphasizing the importance of the time-frame references and the historical context of Jesus's prophecies, while maintaining the traditional Christian hope in a future, visible return of Christ and resurrection.

d. The End of the Age

A crucial concept in eschatological debate is the meaning of "the end of the age." Sproul and preterist scholars argue that this phrase, as used by Jesus, refers not to the end of the physical world but to the end of the Jewish age or Old Covenant era. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple signaled the close of the Mosaic dispensation and the inauguration of the age of the Gentiles (the church age). This interpretation is supported by the Greek word aion (age), which is distinct from kosmos (world), and by passages in the Gospels and Paul's letters that speak of the "end of the age" as a near-term event for their original audience.

e. The Destruction of Jerusalem

Sproul underscores the significance of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 as a major fulfillment of Jesus's prophecies. He draws on the detailed historical accounts of Josephus and others to show how the events of the Jewish War, including the siege and fall of Jerusalem, correspond closely to Jesus's predictions in the Olivet Discourse. The devastation, false prophets, celestial signs, and unparalleled tribulation described by Josephus are presented as evidence that Jesus's words were fulfilled in a dramatic and historically verifiable way. This event marks a watershed in redemptive history, ending the Old Covenant sacrificial system and dispersing the Jewish people.

f. The Book of Revelation

The interpretation of Revelation is a major battleground for eschatological views. Sproul discusses the importance of the book's date: if it was written before AD 70, its prophecies could refer to the destruction of Jerusalem; if after, they must point to future events. He highlights the numerous time-frame references in Revelation ("must shortly take place," "the time is near," "I am coming quickly") as supporting a preterist reading. The book also explores the identity of the Beast (often linked to Nero), the

role of the temple, and the structure of Revelation as an extended prophetic warning to first-century Christians.

g. Resurrection and the Millennium

A key dividing line between partial and full preterism is the nature and timing of the resurrection and the millennium:

- Full preterists argue that the resurrection was spiritual and has already occurred, along with the rapture and final judgment.
- Partial preterists and the historic Christian creeds maintain that the bodily resurrection, rapture, and final judgment are still future events.

Sproul describes the various millennial positions:

- **Amillennialism:** The millennium is the present spiritual reign of Christ.
- **Postmillennialism:** The kingdom of God will expand on earth through the church's influence, culminating in a golden age before Christ's return.
- **Premillennialism:** Christ will return before a literal thousand-year reign on earth.

He critiques full preterism for its inability to account for the bodily resurrection and cautions against abandoning the creedal consensus of the historic church.

h. The Antichrist

The book explores the identity of the Antichrist, a figure shrouded in mystery and speculation. Sproul surveys the biblical data:

- The term "antichrist" appears in John's epistles, referring both to a spirit of opposition to Christ and to individuals who deny the incarnation.
- Paul's "man of lawlessness" and the "beast" of Revelation are often identified with the Antichrist.
- Preterist interpreters frequently identify the Beast with Nero, supported by cryptographic readings of "666" and the historical context of emperor worship.

Sproul encourages careful exegesis and cautions against sensationalist and speculative identifications of the Antichrist, emphasizing the relevance of historical context.

i. Critique of Dispensationalism

Sproul directly interacts with Dispensationalist theology, especially its approach to prophecy, the timing of Christ's return, and the interpretation of the Olivet Discourse and Revelation. He highlights the weaknesses of Dispensationalism's insistence that most or all New Testament prophecies about the end times remain unfulfilled and are to occur in the future, particularly in relation to the modern state of Israel and a rebuilt temple. Sproul challenges the Dispensationalist separation between Israel and the Church and its tendency to read biblical prophecy through the lens of current events, such as those involving the state of Israel after 1948.

He also critiques the Dispensationalist hermeneutic that interprets prophetic passages in a strictly literal and futuristic manner, often ignoring the time-frame indicators ("this generation," "soon," "at hand") found in the New Testament.

j. Critique of Evangelical Literalism

The book also critiques Evangelical Literalism, especially as it applies to prophecy. Sproul distinguishes between the classical Reformation understanding of the "literal sense" (sensus literalis)—which means interpreting Scripture according to its literary genre and context—and a modern, often wooden literalism that insists on a straightforward, surface-level reading of apocalyptic and prophetic imagery. He argues that such literalism leads to interpretive errors, particularly in reading the Olivet Discourse and Revelation as predicting events that must occur in a hyper-literal, physical way in the distant future, rather than recognizing their fulfillment in metaphorical or symbolic terms within the first-century context.

Sproul critiques the tendency among some evangelicals to ignore the symbolic and literary features of biblical prophecy, which leads to misunderstandings about the timing and nature of the events Jesus foretold.

In summary, Sproul's *The Last Days According to Jesus* systematically addresses the key issues in biblical eschatology, focusing on the meaning of Jesus's prophecies, the historical fulfillment of many "last days" events, and the responsible interpretation of apocalyptic literature. He defends the reliability of Jesus and the New Testament, challenges both skepticism and literalist excess, and advocates for a nuanced, historically grounded, and theologically robust approach to the end times.

Testimony #20: DeMar – Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church (1999)

The Author: **Gary DeMar** is an American writer and lecturer. A former student of Greg Bahnsen, and protégé of Gary North, he has written several books on Christian reconstructionism, apologetics, and eschatology, as well as books targeting the homeschool movement. He is currently the president of The American Vision, a biblical worldview ministry. He hosts "The Gary DeMar Podcast." DeMar is a graduate of Western Michigan University (B.S., 1973) and Reformed Theological Seminary (M.Div., 1979).[39]

The Book: "***Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church***"[40] is a critical examination of modern Christian eschatology, focusing particularly on the widespread obsession within the church regarding the "end times" and the return of Christ. Gary DeMar challenges the dominant dispensational premillennialist perspective, instead advocating for a preterist approach, which interprets many biblical prophecies as being fulfilled in the first century, particularly in the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The book aims to correct what DeMar sees as misinterpretations that have led to repeated failed predictions and a distortion of biblical prophecy.

Major Topics and Core Ideas

A. Critique of Dispensationalism and Futurism

Dispensational Premillennialism has become the dominant interpretive framework in much of modern evangelicalism, especially in the United States. This system divides history into distinct "dispensations" and places a heavy emphasis on a future, literal fulfillment of biblical prophecies, including the rapture, a seven-year tribulation, a rebuilt Jewish temple, and a millennial reign of Christ from Jerusalem. DeMar critiques this approach on several grounds:

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[39] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gary_DeMar

[40] DeMar, Gary. *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*. American Vision, 1999.

- **Recent Origins:** Dispensationalism is a relatively new doctrine, emerging in the 19th century, particularly through the teachings of John Nelson Darby and later popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible. DeMar points out that for most of church history, Christians did not hold these views, and their novelty should make us cautious.
- **Non-Literal Handling of Time Texts:** While dispensationalists claim to interpret the Bible "literally," DeMar shows they often spiritualize or ignore the numerous time indicators ("soon," "at hand," "this generation") that clearly point to a first-century fulfillment of many prophecies. He highlights the inconsistency of those who insist on literal interpretation for some passages but not for others.
- **Failure to Address Contradictions:** The dispensational system, according to DeMar, is built on a "foundation of sand" because it cannot consistently explain the biblical data, especially regarding the timing and nature of prophetic events. He notes that even within dispensational circles, there is ongoing debate and revision, as seen in the emergence of "progressive dispensationalism".

B. Preterism and Fulfilled Prophecy

Preterism is the view that many, if not most, New Testament prophecies were fulfilled in the first century, particularly in the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. DeMar argues:

- **Historical Fulfillment:** Jesus' prophecies in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) are best understood as referring to the catastrophic events of A.D. 70, not to a future global apocalypse. He provides detailed scriptural and historical evidence that the "abomination of desolation," the "great tribulation," and the "coming of the Son of Man" were fulfilled in that generation.
- **Time Texts as Key:** DeMar emphasizes the importance of time statements in the New Testament ("this generation will not pass away," "some standing here will not taste death until...," "the time is near"), arguing that these must be taken at face value rather than reinterpreted to fit a futurist agenda.
- **Covenantal Transition:** The destruction of Jerusalem signified the definitive end of the Old Covenant era and the full inauguration of the New Covenant. The passing away of "heaven and earth" is interpreted as the dissolution of the old Jewish order, not the end of the physical cosmos.

C. Misuse of Signs and Failed Predictions

DeMar documents the long history of failed end-times predictions throughout church history:

- **Recurring Pattern:** Every generation has seen the rise of prophetic speculation, with various "signs" (wars, famines, earthquakes, political upheavals) interpreted as evidence that the end was near. Examples range from early church figures, through the Middle Ages, to modern prophecy writers like Hal Lindsey and Edgar Whisenant.
- **Date Setting and Disillusionment:** He critiques the repeated attempts to set dates for the rapture or second coming, all of which have failed. Such failures lead to skepticism, loss of faith, and the church being perceived as unreliable or even foolish by outsiders.
- **"Newspaper Exegesis":** DeMar warns against the tendency to interpret current events as direct fulfillments of biblical prophecy, a practice he terms "newspaper exegesis." This approach leads to ever-changing interpretations as world events shift, undermining confidence in the Bible and its message.

D. Literal vs. Symbolic Interpretation

A major theme of the book is the *proper method of biblical interpretation*, especially regarding prophetic and apocalyptic language:

- **Contextual Consistency:** DeMar calls for interpreting prophetic language in light of its Old Testament background and literary context, rather than imposing a modern, literalistic reading. For example, "sun, moon, and stars" language is shown to be symbolic of political and covenantal upheaval, not literal cosmic disasters.
- **Time Indicators:** He stresses that words like "soon," "quickly," and "at hand" should be understood according to their normal usage, not redefined to fit a particular theological system.
- **Apocalyptic Imagery:** DeMar provides numerous examples showing that the Bible frequently uses cosmic imagery (stars falling, heavens shaken, coming on clouds) to describe God's judgment on nations or covenantal transitions, rather than literal end-of-the-world events.

E. Theological and Practical Implications

DeMar argues that misinterpretation of prophecy has significant consequences for the church:

- **Credibility and Witness:** The continual cycle of failed predictions damages the church's credibility and can become a stumbling block for both believers and skeptics.
- **Focus and Mission:** Obsession with end-times speculation often distracts Christians from faithful living, gospel proclamation, and cultural engagement in the present. DeMar calls for a focus on what Scripture actually teaches and the responsibilities of Christians in the here and now.
- **Call to Reformation:** He urges the church to return to a "Reformation" principle—always reforming according to the Word of God, rather than being swayed by popular trends or sensationalist prophecy books.

In conclusion, "*Last Days Madness*" is a comprehensive critique of modern end-times obsession in the church, calling for a return to responsible, context-driven biblical interpretation. DeMar's work is a challenge to both popular prophecy teachers and lay Christians to reconsider the foundation and focus of their eschatological beliefs, rooting them firmly in Scripture and history rather than speculation and sensationalism.

Testimony #21: Prior – Zionism and the State of Israel: A Moral Inquiry (1999)

The Author: **Michael Prior** (1942-2004) was a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, professor of biblical theology at Saint Mary's College, University of Surrey, and a liberation theologian. He was an outspoken critic of Israel and Zionism. He was the editor of Holy Land Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal and the author of numerous books, including *Christians in the Holy Land* (1994), *Western Scholarship and the History of Palestine* (1998), *Zionism and the State of Israel: A Moral Inquiry* (1999), *Holy Land – Hollow Jubilee: God, Justice and the Palestinians* (1999), and *They Came and They Saw: Western Christian Experiences of the Holy Land* (2000).[41]

The Book: "***Zionism and the State of Israel: A Moral Inquiry.***"[42] The book critically examines Zionism and the State of Israel, focusing on their historical development, biblical and theological justifications, and especially the moral implications for the indigenous Palestinian population. The work aims to bridge the gap between biblical scholarship, theology, human rights, and political analysis, emphasizing the necessity of engaging with the ethical consequences of Zionist settlement and conquest in Palestine. Prior's own journey from initial support for Israel to a more critical stance is based on personal experiences and extensive research.

Core Ideas and Arguments

A. Historical Development of Zionism

Origins and Ideological Foundations

- **Emergence in 19th-century Europe:** Zionism arose in the context of rising European nationalism and persistent antisemitism. The movement was initially secular and political, seeking a solution to the "Jewish Question"—the social, economic, and political marginalization of Jews in Europe. Theodor

[41] https://www.simonandschuster.com/authors/Rev-Dr-Michael-Prior/189274539
[42] Prior, Michael. *Zionism and the State of Israel. A Moral Inquiry*. Routledge, 1999.

Herzl, considered the father of modern Zionism, articulated the need for a Jewish state as a refuge from antisemitism and a means for Jews to achieve national self-determination.

- **Diversity within Zionism:** From its inception, Zionism was not monolithic. It included multiple strands—political, cultural, religious, revisionist, and labor Zionism—each with different visions for the Jewish future and the nature of the proposed state.

Phases of Zionist History

- **Early Phase (1896–1917):** Herzl's advocacy, the First Zionist Congress (1897), and the establishment of the World Zionist Organization laid the groundwork for Jewish migration (aliyah) and land acquisition in Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire. The movement faced significant opposition from both religious Jews and assimilated Jews in Western Europe, who often saw themselves as citizens of their respective countries first.

- **British Mandate and Balfour Declaration (1917–1948):** The Balfour Declaration (1917) expressed British support for a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, setting the stage for increased Jewish immigration and land purchases. This period saw escalating tensions between Jewish immigrants and the indigenous Arab population, culminating in violence, British commissions and white papers, and the eventual UN Partition Plan of 1947.

- **Establishment of Israel and the Nakba (1948):** The UN Partition Plan allocated a majority of the land to a Jewish state despite Jews being a demographic minority and owning a small fraction of the land. The declaration of the State of Israel in 1948 led to war with neighboring Arab states and the mass expulsion or flight of 700,000–800,000 Palestinians (the Nakba, or "catastrophe"). Hundreds of Palestinian villages were destroyed, and a large-scale refugee crisis ensued.

- **Post-1948 Expansion and Occupation (1948–1967):** Israel consolidated its control, enacted laws to expropriate land from Palestinians, and further marginalized the Arab minority that remained within its borders. The 1967 Six-Day War marked another turning point, with Israel occupying the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and other territories, leading to further displacement and the beginning of the settlement enterprise in the occupied territories.

- **Peace Process Era and Beyond (1993–):** The Oslo Accords (1993) initiated a peace process that created the Palestinian Authority and led to limited Palestinian self-rule in parts of the West Bank and Gaza. However, settlement

expansion continued, and the peace process has largely stalled, with the reality on the ground characterized by ongoing occupation, settlement growth, and periodic violence.

Colonial Context

- Zionism as Colonial Project: Prior situates Zionism within the broader context of European settler colonialism. He argues that, like other colonial projects, Zionism involved the support of imperial powers (Britain, later the USA) and was predicated on the displacement, dispossession, and marginalization of the indigenous population. The rhetoric of "making the desert bloom" and "civilizing" the land mirrored colonial attitudes elsewhere.
- Strategic Interests: The support of Britain and later the United States was rooted not only in sympathy for Jewish suffering but also in the perceived strategic value of a loyal Western outpost in the Middle East, especially for protecting routes to India and countering Soviet influence during the Cold War.

B. Biblical and Religious Justifications

The Role of the Bible

- **Biblical Narrative as Charter:** Zionism draws heavily on the biblical narrative of the Promised Land, particularly God's promise to Abraham and his descendants. These texts have been used both by Zionists and their Christian supporters to frame Jewish claims to Palestine as divinely mandated and morally unassailable.
- **Selective Interpretation:** Prior emphasizes that the use of the Bible for political purposes involves selective interpretation. While some traditions stress justice and compassion, others endorse conquest and the expulsion or destruction of indigenous peoples, as seen in the Book of Joshua. These latter traditions have often been invoked to legitimize violent dispossession.

Evolution of Jewish Religious Attitudes

- Early Religious Opposition: Initially, most religious Jews and rabbinic authorities opposed Zionism. The dominant view was that only the Messiah, not human political action, could restore Jews to the land. Early Zionists were often secular, and religious leaders viewed their project as heretical.
- Integration and Transformation: Over time, especially after the creation of the state, religious Zionism emerged as a powerful force. Figures like Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook and his son Zvi Yehuda Kook reinterpreted Zionism as

part of God's plan, integrating nationalist goals with religious messianism. The settler movement, particularly Gush Emunim, embodies this fusion, asserting a divine mandate to settle all of biblical Israel, regardless of the consequences for Palestinians.

Christian Zionism

- Evangelical Support: Many evangelical Christians, especially in the United States, have become fervent supporters of Israel, viewing its establishment and expansion as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and a necessary precursor to the Second Coming of Christ. This support is often politically influential and largely uncritical of Israeli policies.
- Mainstream Churches: Mainline Christian denominations have historically been more ambivalent, balancing support for Israel with concern for Palestinian rights. However, guilt over Christian antisemitism and the Holocaust has often muted criticism of Israeli policies.

C. Myths and Moral Critique

Foundational Myths

- **No Expulsions:** Zionist historiography has often promoted the myth that Palestinians left voluntarily in 1948, ignoring or denying documented instances of expulsion, massacres (e.g., Deir Yassin), and systematic destruction of villages. Prior details the evidence for planned and executed "population transfer" and ethnic cleansing.
- **Self-Defense and Purity of Arms:** Israeli narratives frequently portray the state as acting solely in self-defense and adhering to a strict moral code ("purity of arms"), despite evidence of aggressive military actions, punitive measures, and violations of international law.
- **Diaspora Longing and Right to Return:** Zionism claims to fulfill an ancient, unbroken Jewish longing to return to the land. Prior challenges this, noting that for most of Jewish history, the diaspora was not seen as exile in need of remedy, and that large-scale return was not a practical or theological aspiration for the vast majority of Jews until the modern period.
- **The Shoah as Legitimizer:** The Holocaust is often invoked to justify the necessity and legitimacy of the State of Israel. While acknowledging the unprecedented suffering of Jews, Prior argues that this does not morally justify the displacement and ongoing suffering of Palestinians.

Moral and Human Rights Critique

- **Ethical Evaluation:** Prior insists on subjecting both the biblical narrative and Zionist actions to universal ethical scrutiny—principles of justice, human rights, and international law. He finds the use of religious texts to justify dispossession and violence deeply troubling and contrary to the ethical core of both Judaism and Christianity.
- **International Law:** The establishment and expansion of Israel involved violations of international law, including the inadmissibility of acquiring territory by war and the right of refugees to return to their homes. The ongoing occupation and settlement policy are widely recognized as illegal under international conventions.
- **Necessity of Honest Reckoning:** Prior calls for a reckoning with the historical and ethical realities of Zionism, not only among Israelis and Jews but also among Christians and Western governments that have supported Israel uncritically.

Jewish and Israeli Dissent

- Internal Critique: There is a significant tradition of Jewish dissent, both secular and religious, that challenges the mainstream Zionist narrative. Some advocate for a bi-national state, others for full equality for Palestinians, and many for a rethinking of the relationship between Judaism and nationalism. The Israeli peace movement, as well as groups like Rabbis for Human Rights, provide alternative visions rooted in justice and reconciliation.
- Universalist and Humanist Arguments: Jewish universalists have argued that Jewish ethics require solidarity with the oppressed and a commitment to justice for all, including Palestinians.

D. The Role of the International Community and Christian Churches

Western Support and Complicity

- **Strategic and Political Interests:** The international community, especially Britain and the USA, played a decisive role in enabling the Zionist project, often for reasons of strategic interest rather than humanitarian concern.
- **Christian Guilt and Silence:** Many Western Christian churches have been reluctant to criticize Israel due to guilt over Christian antisemitism and the Holocaust. This has sometimes led to a "dialogue" with Jewish organizations that is more about avoiding offense than addressing justice for Palestinians.

- **Theological Shifts:** While some churches have begun to voice concern for Palestinian rights, the dominant trend remains one of support for Israel, often couched in theological or moral language that fails to grapple with the realities of occupation and dispossession.

E. The Call for a New Moral Paradigm

- **Justice, Human Rights, and Reconciliation**
- Beyond Nationalism and Religious Exclusivism: Prior urges both Jews and Christians to move beyond exclusivist narratives and embrace a universal ethic of justice, equality, and reconciliation. This involves recognizing the full humanity and rights of Palestinians and Israelis alike.
- Re-examining Theological Claims: He calls for a critical re-examination of the use of sacred texts in political discourse, insisting that religious traditions should be sources of compassion and justice, not instruments of exclusion or violence.
- Hope for the Future: The book concludes by suggesting that true peace can only be achieved through an honest reckoning with the past, a commitment to justice, and the creation of a political framework that guarantees equal rights and dignity for all inhabitants of the land.

In summary, Prior's core argument is that the moral, theological, and historical justifications for Zionism and the State of Israel must be critically examined in light of their consequences for Palestinians. He contends that neither ancient texts nor recent tragedies can absolve the injustices committed, and he calls for a new, inclusive moral vision rooted in justice and universal human rights.

Testimony #22: Canfield – The Incredible Scofield and His Book (2004)

The Author: **Joseph M. Canfield** (1924–2013) was an American historian, researcher, and writer known for his critical scholarship on the history of American Evangelicalism and Dispensationalism. Best known for his book The Incredible Scofield and His Book (first published in 1988 and revised in 2004), Canfield meticulously investigated the life and legacy of C. I. Scofield, offering a detailed and often controversial account that challenged the hagiographic tradition within fundamentalist circles. With a background in law, journalism, and Christian research, Canfield contributed articles to various theological journals and was associated with the Chalcedon Foundation and Ross House Books, which published his major work.

The Book: "***The Incredible Scofield and His Book.***"[43] The book is a critical biography of Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843–1921), the author of the influential Scofield Reference Bible. The book investigates Scofield's life, his controversial past, his rise to prominence in American Evangelical circles, and the profound impact of his work on Protestant theology, especially the spread of Dispensationalism. Canfield meticulously explores Scofield's personal history, professional career, theological development, and the social-religious context that enabled his ascendancy.

Main Controversies and Criticism

A. Biographical Discrepancies and Image Construction

1. Myth-Making and Selective Storytelling

Canfield meticulously documents how many aspects of Scofield's life story were later embellished, sanitized, or outright fabricated by his followers and by Scofield himself.

[43] Canfield, Joseph M. *The Incredible Scofield and His Book*. Ross House Books, 1988 (a Revised Edition in 2004).

This myth-making process was central to Scofield's elevation as a spiritual authority and the subsequent spread of his ideas.

- **Military Service Myths:** Scofield's brief and relatively undistinguished service in the Confederate Army was later recast as heroic and decorated. Claims that he received the "Cross of Honor" for bravery at Antietam, or served throughout the war, are refuted by official records, which show he was discharged early as a minor and "alien friend." The actual "Cross of Honor" he received was a commemorative medal awarded decades later to all surviving Confederate veterans, not a wartime honor for valor. These embellishments were perpetuated to bolster Scofield's credibility in Southern circles and to create a more dramatic conversion narrative.
- **Conversion Narrative:** The story of Scofield's sudden and dramatic conversion, often attributed to the intervention of Tom McPheeters in a St. Louis law office, is shown to be problematic. Canfield finds no supporting evidence for the timing, circumstances, or details of the account as is commonly told. The lack of contemporary documentation, coupled with inconsistencies in Scofield's own accounts, suggests that the story was retrofitted to serve the needs of later biographers and to provide a clear break between Scofield's checkered past and his ministry.
- **Professional Reputation:** Scofield's transformation from a lawyer and politician—dogged by scandal, accusations of forgery, and abandonment of his family—into a revered Bible teacher and pastor is presented as a case study in reputation management. The book shows how Scofield and his supporters carefully curated his public image, omitting or whitewashing episodes that would have disqualified him from ministry in most Evangelical contexts of his day.

2. Hagiography and Institutional Support

Canfield further critiques how later institutions, including publishers, seminaries, and churches, contributed to the Scofield legend by suppressing dissent, ignoring critical scholarship, and promoting a sanitized narrative. This hagiography became deeply entrenched in the culture of American fundamentalism, making it difficult for alternative views or critical perspectives to gain traction.

B. Personal Ethics and Moral Failures

1. Family Abandonment and Divorce

Canfield is unsparing in his account of Scofield's personal life, which stands in stark contrast to the moral and ethical standards expected of Christian leaders both then and now.

- **Abandonment of First Family:** Scofield left his first wife, Leontine, and their daughters in poverty, providing little or no financial support and effectively disappearing from their lives. Leontine was forced to support the family through her own labor, and the children grew up without their father's presence or assistance. While Scofield was rising to fame as a Bible teacher, his first family struggled in obscurity and deprivation.
- **Divorce and Remarriage:** The divorce proceedings initiated by Leontine, and Scofield's subsequent remarriage to Hettie Van Wark, are presented as scandalous by the standards of the late 19th-century church. Such actions would have disqualified him from ministry in many denominations, and yet they were hidden or downplayed by Scofield and his supporters. Canfield notes that Scofield's marital history was kept secret from his followers, and that his remarriage occurred under circumstances that would have been unacceptable in the Evangelical world he came to lead.

2. Financial and Legal Misconduct

- **Forgery and Corruption:** Canfield details Scofield's involvement in forgery, questionable land deals, and political corruption during his years as a lawyer and public official. He presents evidence of forged signatures, defaulted debts, and resignations from public office under a cloud of scandal. These episodes were not isolated lapses but part of a pattern of behavior that raises serious questions about Scofield's character and suitability for spiritual leadership.
- **Lack of Restitution or Repentance:** Canfield emphasizes that there is little evidence Scofield ever made restitution to those he defrauded or expressed genuine repentance for his actions. Instead, he quickly reinvented himself as a Christian leader, with the support of influential patrons who were either unaware of or willing to overlook his past.

C. Theological Critique and Social Consequences

1. Dispensational Pessimism and Social Disengagement

Canfield's critique of Scofield's theology is as sharp as his biographical analysis. He argues that the Dispensational system, as codified in the Scofield Reference Bible, fostered a pessimistic, defeatist attitude toward the church and society:

- **The "Failing Church" Narrative:** Dispensationalism, drawing heavily from J. N. Darby and the Plymouth Brethren, teaches that the church age will end in apostasy and failure, with true believers awaiting rescue by the imminent Rapture. This worldview, Canfield asserts, undermined the church's engagement with social, political, and cultural issues, encouraging withdrawal and fatalism rather than active transformation of society.
- **Impact on American Christianity:** The widespread adoption of Scofield's Reference Bible, especially among fundamentalists, led to a generation of Christians who saw the world as irredeemably evil and the church as destined to fail. This had the effect of discouraging involvement in social justice, political reform, and cultural leadership, contributing to the marginalization of Evangelical voices in public life.

2. Antinomian Tendencies and Ethical Laxity

- **Law and Grace Dichotomy:** Scofield's radical separation of "law" and "grace" is critiqued for fostering antinomianism—a disregard for moral law and ethical standards. By labeling any call to obedience or moral discipline as "legalism," Scofield's followers were encouraged to focus on doctrinal correctness and prophetic speculation rather than personal holiness or social responsibility.
- **Consequences for Church Discipline:** This theological stance made it difficult for churches influenced by Scofield to enforce biblical standards of conduct or to hold leaders accountable for moral failings, contributing to ongoing scandals and ethical lapses within the movement.

3. Historical and Doctrinal Novelty

- **Lack of Historical Roots:** Canfield and other critics (citing figures such as Oswald Allis, Patrick Fairbairn, and J. Stuart Russell) argue that Dispensationalism is a modern innovation with little precedent in historic Christianity. The claim that it represents a "recovery of lost truths" is challenged as historically unfounded. Instead, the system is seen as a product of 19th-century sectarianism, imported from British Brethren circles and popularized through American publishing and conference networks.
- **Selective Use of Scripture:** The Scofield Reference Bible's method of "rightly dividing" the Word is critiqued for its selective and arbitrary 2approach to biblical interpretation, often ignoring context, tradition, and the broader witness of the church in favor of a rigid, preconceived system.

D. Influence, Legacy, and Suppression of Dissent

1. Institutionalization of the Scofield Myth

Despite the many controversies surrounding his life and theology, Scofield's Reference Bible became the standard text for generations of American Evangelicals and fundamentalists. Canfield documents how institutions (Bible colleges, seminaries, publishing houses) played a key role in cementing the Scofield legend, often actively suppressing critical voices and alternative perspectives.

2. Marginalization of Critics

- **Suppression of Alternative Theologies:** The dominance of Scofield's system led to the marginalization of postmillennial, amillennial, and covenantal viewpoints, as well as the suppression of critical scholarship that questioned the historical or biblical basis of Dispensationalism.
- **Discouragement of Honest Inquiry:** Within fundamentalist circles, questioning Scofield's authority or the accuracy of his Reference Bible was often equated with unorthodoxy or rebellion, creating an environment where honest historical and theological inquiry was discouraged.

E. Conclusion: A Cautionary Tale for the Church

Canfield's work is ultimately a warning against the dangers of religious celebrity, the manipulation of personal narrative for institutional gain, and the uncritical acceptance of theological systems built on questionable foundations. He calls the church to:

- **Historical Honesty:** To confront the realities of its leaders' lives and legacies, rather than perpetuating myths for the sake of unity or expedience.
- **Ethical Integrity:** To hold leaders accountable to the standards they preach, and to recognize that doctrine divorced from practice is ultimately hollow.
- **Theological Depth:** To engage Scripture with humility, historical awareness, and a willingness to learn from the broader Christian tradition, rather than being swept along by fads or charismatic personalities.

Canfield's critique is not merely a personal attack on Scofield, but a challenge to the entire culture of American Evangelicalism that allowed such a figure to rise unchecked, and that continues to be shaped by the theological and ethical consequences of his legacy.

In summary, Canfield's book is a sweeping, well-documented critique of both C. I. Scofield as an individual and the movement he inspired. It exposes the gap between the carefully constructed legend and the complex, troubling reality, and it calls for

greater discernment, honesty, and responsibility within the church and the wider Christian community.

Testimony #23: Rossing – The Rapture Exposed. The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation (2004)

The Author: **Barbara R. Rossing** is professor of New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, where she has taught since 1994. She loves to teach and preach about the Bible, including the Bible's role in public life. Ordained in 1982, she served as pastor of a congregation in Minnesota, director for Global Mission Interpretation for the American Lutheran Church, pastor at Holden Village Retreat Center, Chelan, Wash., and chaplain at Harvard University Divinity School.[44]

The Book: "***The Rapture Exposed***"[45] The book critically examines the popular "Rapture" theology, especially as promoted by the *Left Behind* novels and contemporary dispensationalist movements. Rossing argues that this theology distorts the biblical message of hope, love, and justice found in the book of Revelation, replacing it with a narrative of escapism, violence, and political extremism. Her goal is to reclaim Revelation as a life-giving text that offers hope for the world rather than predicting inevitable destruction.

Main Topics and Core Ideas

A. Critique of Rapture Theology

1. Origins and Development

- The concept of the Rapture, a sudden, secret removal of Christians from the earth before a time of tribulation—is a relatively new doctrine in Christian history. It was first articulated by John Nelson Darby, a 19th-century British preacher, and was subsequently disseminated through the Scofield Reference Bible in the early 20th century. This Bible, with its annotated notes, helped entrench dispensationalist ideas in American evangelicalism.

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[44] https://lstc.edu/academics/emeritus/barbara-rossing/

[45] Rossing, Barbara R. *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation.* Basic Books, 2004.

- Prior to Darby, mainstream Christian teaching focused on the resurrection of the dead and the visible second coming of Christ, not on a two-stage return with a secret removal of believers. The Rapture concept was further popularized through mass media, especially the *Left Behind* novels, which dramatize these ideas in a modern, action-packed context.

2. Biblical Basis and Interpretive Issues

- Rapture theology claims to be based on a literal reading of the Bible, but Rossing demonstrates that the term "Rapture" does not appear in scripture, nor does the Bible describe the sequence of events dispensationalists assert.
- Key passages often cited (such as 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, Matthew 24:40–41, and John 14:1–2) are interpreted out of context. Rossing shows that these passages refer to resurrection and the hope of Christ's return—not to a secret removal of believers. For example, the "meeting in the air" in 1 Thessalonians refers to greeting a dignitary and welcoming him, not leaving earth.
- Dispensationalists construct elaborate timelines by stitching together unrelated verses from Daniel, Revelation, and other prophetic books. This approach often involves inserting "gaps" of thousands of years into prophetic texts (e.g., the "gap" between the 69th and 70th weeks in Daniel 9), which is not justified by the text itself and is rejected by most biblical scholars.

3. Literalism vs. Metaphor

- The dispensationalist claim of reading Revelation "literally" is inconsistent. For example, they interpret some symbols (like the four horsemen) as metaphors, but insist on the literalness of a seven-year tribulation or a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, even when the text does not support such specificity.
- Rossing argues that Revelation, like much apocalyptic literature, is rich in metaphor, symbol, and visionary imagery. A strictly literal approach misses the deeper theological and ethical messages of the text.

B. The Political and Ethical Consequences

1. Escapism and Environmental Neglect

- Rapture theology fosters an attitude of escapism, teaching that the world is destined for destruction and that believers should focus on saving souls rather than addressing social or ecological problems.
- This outlook can lead to indifference or even hostility toward environmental stewardship. Some proponents argue that since the earth will be destroyed soon, there is little reason to care for it or work toward sustainability—a stance Rossing condemns as both unbiblical and dangerous.

2. Middle East Policy and Christian Zionism

- Dispensationalist theology has had a profound effect on American foreign policy, especially regarding the Middle East. It encourages unwavering support for Israeli expansionism, opposition to peace initiatives, and the belief that conflict in the region is both inevitable and desirable as a sign of the end times.
- The doctrine of "Christian Zionism" is not the same as traditional support for Israel's right to exist. Instead, it frames Israel and the Palestinians as players in a prophetic drama, often justifying violence, settlement expansion, and even ethnic cleansing as part of God's plan.
- This theology ignores the plight of Palestinian Christians and promotes policies that undermine peace and justice for all people in the region.

3. Glorification of Violence and War

- Rapture theology, especially as depicted in the *Left Behind* novels, glorifies violence, militarism, and war. Armageddon is portrayed as the ultimate, divinely sanctioned conflict, and readers are encouraged to identify with a "Tribulation Force" that uses weapons and technology to fight evil.
- This narrative feeds into a "bunker mentality," where believers see themselves as embattled survivors, justified in using violence and isolating themselves from the world. It stands in stark contrast to the biblical call to peacemaking and reconciliation.

C. Reclaiming Revelation's Message

1. Prophecy as Warning, Not Prediction

- Rossing insists that biblical prophecy is not a fixed, predetermined script for the future. Instead, it functions as a warning, calling people to repentance, justice, and faithfulness. Like the story of Jonah and Nineveh, prophetic warnings are conditional—meant to inspire change, not to predict doom.
- Revelation's terrifying images serve as "wake-up calls" to resist injustice and align with God's vision for the world, not as predictions of inevitable disaster.

2. The Lamb's Power—Nonviolence and Love

- At the heart of Revelation is the image of the Lamb (Jesus), who conquers not through violence or military might, but through self-giving love, sacrifice, and nonviolent resistance.
- Christians are called to "follow the Lamb" in their own lives, practicing hospitality, caring for the marginalized, and resisting the oppressive powers of their day. The Lamb's victory is one of endurance, testimony, and solidarity with the suffering, not domination or destruction.

3. Hope for the World, Not Escape from It

- The climax of Revelation is the vision of New Jerusalem—a renewed, healed city where God dwells with humanity. This vision is not about escaping the world, but about God's presence and healing being realized on earth.
- The river of life and the tree of life, central images in Revelation's conclusion, symbolize abundance, healing, and justice for all nations and creation itself. This is a call for Christians to engage in the world's healing, embodying hope, justice, and love in the present.
- The ethical imperative is clear: Christians are to live as people of hope, actively working for the flourishing of all creation, rather than passively awaiting escape or destruction.

In conclusion, Rossing's "*The Rapture Exposed"* is a passionate and scholarly call to reject escapist, violent readings of Revelation and to embrace its true message: God's love for the world, the call to justice and nonviolence, and the hope of healing for all creation. Revelation is not a script for war or destruction, but an urgent invitation to participate in God's renewing work here and now.

Testimony #24: Sizer – Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon? (2004)

The Author: **Stephen Sizer** (born 27 July 1953) is a British Anglican priest, theologian, and author recognized for his scholarship on Christian Zionism and its impact on church, theology, and Middle Eastern politics. He served for many years as the vicar of Christ Church, Virginia Water, in Surrey, England. Sizer holds advanced degrees in theology, including a doctorate from Oak Hill Theological College and Middlesex University.[46]

The Book: "***Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?***"[47] The book critically examines the history, theology, and political impact of evangelical Christian Zionism from 1800 to the early 2000s, focusing on its development in Britain and America. The study is organized into chapters covering the historical roots, theological foundations, and political implications of Christian Zionism, concluding with a critical assessment and suggested alternatives.

Other relevant books by Stephen Sizer:

i. Sizer, Stephen. Christian Zionism. Its History, Theology & Politics, (2005)
ii. Sizer, Stephen. *Zion's Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel and the Church*. InterVarsity Press, 2007 (new Edition in 2021.)

Core Topics and Central Ideas

A. Zionism and Christian Zionism: Definitions and Origins

Zionism

- **Definition:** Zionism is a nationalist movement advocating for the return of the Jewish people to Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish homeland. It

[46] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Sizer
[47] Sizer, Stephen. *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* InterVarsity Press, 2004.

arose in 19th-century Europe, largely as a response to anti-Semitism and the lack of Jewish national sovereignty.

- **Diversity:** Zionism is not monolithic. It includes political and practical strands, as well as secular, religious, and socialist currents. Early debates within Zionism included whether to focus on immediate large-scale immigration or gradual settlement, and how to balance national revival with respect for indigenous Arab populations.
- **Evolution:** Over time, Zionism diversified further, with "Messianic Zionism" and religious-nationalist movements gaining influence, particularly after the 1967 Six Day War.

Christian Zionism

- **Definition:** Christian Zionism refers to Christian support for the return of Jews to Palestine and the establishment (and defense) of the State of Israel, based on the belief that these developments fulfill biblical prophecy.
- **Theological Basis:** Christian Zionists interpret certain biblical prophecies literally and futuristically, believing that the Jewish people remain God's chosen people and that the modern State of Israel is the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and his descendants.
- **Complexity:** While some Christian Zionists focus on evangelism (seeking Jewish conversion to Christianity), others prioritize political support for Israel, sometimes even suspending evangelistic efforts in favor of what they see as a prophetic mandate to "bless Israel".

B. Historical Roots and Development

Proto-Christian Zionism and the Reformation

- **Reformation Influence:** The Protestant Reformation fostered renewed interest in the Old Testament and the Jewish people, leading to speculation about their role in God's plan and the possibility of their restoration to Palestine.
- **Puritan Hope:** Many Puritan and post-Reformation theologians believed in the eventual conversion of the Jews and their restoration to their ancestral land as a precursor to the return of Christ.
- **Early Restorationism:** By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, British and American evangelicals began to advocate more actively for Jewish restoration, founding societies such as the London Jews Society (LJS) and later the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People (CMJ).

19th-Century British Christian Zionism

- **Key Figures:** Influential leaders included Lewis Way (financial patron and activist), Charles Simeon (evangelist), Joseph Wolff (missionary), and Charles Spurgeon (Baptist preacher and restorationist).
- **Political Impact:** Figures like Lord Shaftesbury, Lord Palmerston, and Lord Balfour translated Restorationist theology into British foreign policy, culminating in the Balfour Declaration (1917), which gave international legitimacy to the Zionist project.

Dispensationalism and American Christian Zionism

- **Dispensationalism:** Developed by John Nelson Darby, Dispensationalism introduced a highly literal, futurist reading of biblical prophecy, sharply distinguishing between God's plans for Israel and the Church. This theology was popularized in America by James Brookes, D.L. Moody, William Blackstone, and especially through C.I. Scofield's annotated Bible.
- **Prophecy Conferences and Bible Schools:** The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the rise of prophecy conferences and Bible institutes (e.g., Moody Bible Institute, Dallas Theological Seminary), which cemented dispensationalist eschatology and Christian Zionism in American evangelical culture.

C. Theological Foundations and Distinctives

Literal-Futurist Hermeneutic

- **Interpretation:** Christian Zionists insist on interpreting biblical prophecy literally, especially those concerning Israel's land, people, and future. They apply Old Testament promises directly to the modern State of Israel, rather than to the Church or to spiritual realities.
- **Dispensationalism:** This system divides history into distinct "dispensations" or eras, with God operating differently in each. The current "Church Age" is seen as a parenthesis between God's dealings with Israel, which will resume in the end times.

Israel and the Church: Two Peoples, Two Covenants?

- **Separation:** Dispensationalists teach that Israel and the Church are two distinct peoples with separate destinies: Israel's promises are earthly and national, the Church's are spiritual and heavenly.

- **Covenantal Debate:** Some dispensationalists (especially in popular, political forms) have argued for two parallel covenants—one for Jews and one for Christians—raising concerns about "dual covenant" theology and the implications for salvation and evangelism.
- **Restorationism:** The return of Jews to Palestine is seen as a fulfillment of prophecy and a necessary step before Christ's return. This includes beliefs about the rebuilding of the Temple, the centrality of Jerusalem, and the coming battle of Armageddon.

D. Political Consequences and Activism

Support for Israeli Policies

- **Lobbying and Advocacy:** Christian Zionists are highly active in lobbying for pro-Israel policies in the U.S. and other Western countries. They support Israeli government policies, settlements in the West Bank, and oppose territorial compromise in peace negotiations.
- **Jerusalem and the Temple:** Christian Zionists view Jerusalem as the eternal and exclusive capital of Israel and often support efforts to rebuild the Jewish Temple, seeing this as a prophetic necessity.
- **Opposition to Peace Processes:** Many Christian Zionists oppose the Oslo Accords and any "land for peace" initiatives, believing that the land belongs to the Jews by divine right and that compromise is both unbiblical and counter to God's plan.

Influence on U.S. Politics

- **Religious Right and Media:** Leaders such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Hal Lindsey have shaped the views of millions of American evangelicals, influencing U.S. foreign policy toward unwavering support for Israel.
- **Presidential Support:** Several U.S. presidents (e.g., Reagan, Carter, Johnson) have publicly expressed Christian Zionist views, and the movement has built powerful coalitions with Jewish and political organizations to sustain pro-Israel policies.

E. Internal Diversity and Organizational Proliferation

- **Evangelistic vs. Political:** Christian Zionism ranges from evangelistic groups (e.g., Jews for Jesus, CMJ) committed to Jewish evangelism, to explicitly

political organizations (e.g., ICEJ, Bridges for Peace) that discourage evangelism and focus on practical support for Israel.

- **Messianic Judaism:** Movements like the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (MJAA) blend Jewish identity with Christian belief in Jesus as Messiah, often supporting both evangelism and political Zionism.
- **Media and Popular Culture:** Books like Hal Lindsey's The Late Great Planet Earth and Tim LaHaye's Left Behind series have sold tens of millions of copies, spreading Christian Zionist ideas far beyond church circles.

Key Highlights and Critical Issues

A. Theological Critiques

- **Typology and Fulfillment:** Critics argue that Christian Zionism ignores the New Testament's teaching that Christ fulfills the promises to Israel, and that the Church is the continuation or fulfillment of God's covenant people, not a separate entity.
- **Dual Covenant Theology:** The movement is criticized for promoting a dual covenant theology (one for Jews, one for Christians), which departs from historic Christian teaching on salvation through Christ alone.
- **Literalism and Eisegesis:** The literal-futurist hermeneutic is often inconsistent, arbitrary, and sometimes even self-contradictory, as it adapts to changing political realities and sometimes spiritualizes texts when convenient.

B. Political and Ethical Concerns

- **Impact on the Middle East:** Christian Zionist support for Israeli policies, including settlement expansion and opposition to Palestinian statehood, has contributed to the intractability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- **Demonization and Conflict:** The movement sometimes fosters negative stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims and frames the conflict in apocalyptic, dualistic terms, seeing opposition to Israel as opposition to God.
- **Ethical Tensions:** Some Christian Zionist organizations have been accused of neglecting justice, reconciliation, and the rights of Palestinians, focusing instead on a narrow reading of biblical prophecy and political loyalty to Israel.

Organizational Landscape

- **Major Organizations:** The movement includes a variety of organizations, such as:
    - **London Jews Society/CMJ:** Early restorationist, evangelistic.
    - **Jews for Jesus:** Evangelistic, Messianic Dispensationalism.
    - **Bridges for Peace, ICEJ:** Politically focused, often non-evangelistic, supporting aliyah and Israeli government policies.
    - **Christian Friends of Israel:** Humanitarian and political support for Israel.
- **Coalitions and Influence:** These groups collectively reach tens of millions of people, raise hundreds of millions of dollars, and have significant influence in both religious and political spheres, particularly in the United States.

Conclusions and Critical Assessment

- **Historical Development:** Christian Zionism has grown from a marginal religious movement in Britain to a dominant force in American evangelicalism, shaping not only theology but also international politics, particularly U.S. policy in the Middle East.
- **Constructive and Destructive Aspects:** While the movement has fostered support for Jews and the State of Israel, it has also contributed to political intransigence, justified controversial policies, and sometimes fueled conflict rather than reconciliation.
- **Theological Challenge:** Sizer challenges the assumption that Christian Zionism is synonymous with evangelical orthodoxy, arguing that it often distorts biblical theology, neglects the New Testament's teaching on the fulfillment of God's promises in Christ, and undermines the call to justice and reconciliation.
- **Call for Dialogue and Reassessment:** The thesis calls for a more nuanced, biblically grounded approach to Israel and the Middle East, one that recognizes the complexity of the situation and the need for justice, peace, and reconciliation for all peoples in the region.

In summary, Sizer's work is a thorough and critical examination of Christian Zionism, tracing its historical development, theological distinctives, political activism, and the controversies it provokes—urging evangelicals and others to rethink both the theology and political implications of their stance toward Israel and the Middle East.

Testimony #25: Witherington – The Problem with Evangelical Theology (2005)

The Author: Ben Witherington III (born December 30, 1951) is an American Wesleyan-Arminian New Testament scholar. Witherington is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary, a Wesleyan-Holiness seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, and an ordained pastor in the United Methodist Church. Witherington is a prominent evangelical scholar and has written over sixty books.[48]

The Book: "***The Problem with Evangelical Theology.***"[49] Ben Witherington III critically examines the exegetical foundations of three major streams within Evangelical theology—Calvinism (Reformed), Dispensationalism, and Wesleyanism. He argues that each system, while claiming fidelity to Scripture, often imposes theological grids on the biblical text, resulting in interpretations that stray from the original intent and meaning. Witherington's goal is to challenge Evangelicals to return to rigorous, contextually sensitive exegesis and to reform theological systems where they depart from Scripture

Core Topics and Structure

A. The Legacy of the Reformers

Witherington opens by reflecting on the two rallying cries of the Protestant Reformation: "sola Scriptura" (Scripture alone as the final authority) and "semper reformanda" (always reforming). He notes that these principles, though foundational, have been inconsistently applied in the development of Evangelical theology. Modern Evangelicalism, he argues, is a fragmented movement with a multitude of denominations and a worrisome trend toward biblical illiteracy.

He illustrates this drift from Reformation ideals by critiquing three influential examples:

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[48] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Witherington_III

[49] Witherington, Ben. *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism, and Wesleyanism*. Bayler University Press, 2005.

- **Rick Warren's "The Purpose-Driven Life":** Witherington identifies a "radically individualistic Calvinism" in Warren's theology, which he sees as too focused on personal destiny and not enough on biblical mandates for holiness and prayer. He argues that Warren's use of "the will of God" in Paul's letters is misapplied, as Paul's usage refers to sanctification and prayer, not personal vocation or life choices.
- **The "Left Behind" Series:** He criticizes the Dispensationalist eschatology of LaHaye and Jenkins, especially the Americanized "Zionism" that claims a special eschatological role for America—something utterly foreign to the biblical writers. Witherington stresses that biblical prophecy must be interpreted according to its original context and audience, not through the lens of modern national or political concerns.
- **Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ":** Witherington points out that much of the film is extra-biblical, based on anti-Semitic sources, and includes scenes not found in Scripture. He laments the lack of Evangelical protest over these unbiblical elements, seeing it as evidence of a weakened commitment to "sola Scriptura".

These examples set the stage for his critique: Evangelicalism has lost touch with its Reformation roots and needs to recover a rigorous, text-centered approach to theology.

B. Problems with Reformed Theology (Calvinism)

1. Exegetical Issues and the TULIP System

Witherington scrutinizes the five points of Calvinism—Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, Perseverance of the Saints (TULIP)—arguing that they are more logically consistent as a system than they are biblically defensible. He specifically challenges:

- **Perseverance of the Saints ("once saved, always saved"):** He asserts that the New Testament (NT) repeatedly warns believers about the possibility of apostasy, and that the idea that a true Christian cannot fall away is not found in the NT but is contradicted by it.
- **Irresistible Grace and Unconditional Election:** Witherington argues that these doctrines, while logically linked to the idea of predestination, are not supported by the broader narrative of Scripture, which emphasizes genuine human response and responsibility.

2. Misreading Paul: Romans 5–7

A major focus is the Reformed interpretation of Romans, especially chapters 5–7:

- **Augustinian and Lutheran Influence:** Witherington traces how Augustine's reading of Paul, especially on original sin and the bondage of the will (Romans 7), was adopted and intensified by Luther and Calvin. He shows how Augustine's interpretation was shaped by his polemic against Pelagius and then canonized by later Reformers.
- **Romans 7 and the Christian Life:** He contends that Romans 7 does not describe the normal Christian experience, but rather the plight of humanity "in Adam," prior to conversion. The "I" in Romans 7 is not Paul as a Christian, but a rhetorical impersonation of Adam and those outside Christ. For Paul, Christians are "in Christ" and set free from the bondage to sin described in Romans 7; the Christian struggle is now between "Spirit and flesh," not between old and new self.

3. Law, Covenant, and Ethics

- **The Mosaic Law:** Witherington argues that Paul sees the Mosaic Law as a temporary, pro tempore measure, now superseded by the Law of Christ. He critiques both Lutheran antinomianism (rejection of law) and Calvinist continuity (one covenant in many administrations) as misreadings of Paul. For Paul, the new covenant is genuinely new, not simply a renewal of the old.
- **Ethics:** Christian ethics are not based on the Mosaic Law, but on the Law of Christ, which is defined by the pattern and teachings of Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, and oriented toward love and holiness.

C. Critique of Dispensationalism

1. History and Nature

- **Origins:** Dispensationalism arose in the 19th century, originating with John Nelson Darby and popularized in America through figures like Dwight Moody and the Scofield Reference Bible. Unlike Calvinism or Wesleyanism, it did not emerge from deep exegetical study but from visions, popular preaching, and lay theology.
- **Spread:** Its success was fueled by social upheaval (e.g., the American Civil War), mass media, and the desire for an escapist theology promising believers exemption from tribulation.

2. Prophecy and the Rapture

- **Misreading Genre:** Witherington argues that Dispensationalists misunderstand the nature of biblical prophecy and apocalyptic literature. They treat poetic and metaphorical texts as literal predictions of modern events, ignoring their original historical and literary context.
- **The Rapture:** He demonstrates that the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture is a recent invention, not found in the NT. Key texts (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 4–5, Matthew 24) are about the single, public second coming of Christ, not a secret rapture. The imagery of being "caught up" refers to believers meeting Christ as he returns, not escaping tribulation.

3. Israel and the Church

- **One People of God:** Dispensationalism's distinction between Israel and the church, and the notion of two separate plans and sets of promises, is rejected by Witherington. He shows that Paul sees Jew and Gentile united in Christ as one people of God, with all promises fulfilled in Him.
- **Fulfillment in Christ:** All OT prophecies and promises are fulfilled in Christ and in the new covenant community, not in a future political state of Israel.

D. Election, Perseverance, and Apostasy

1. Corporate Election

- **Paul's Context:** Witherington argues that election language in Paul is primarily corporate (God's people "in Christ" or "in Israel"), not about God choosing individuals for salvation or damnation before the foundation of the world.
- **Apostasy is Possible:** He demonstrates from Paul and other NT writers that individuals can be "broken off" from the elect group through unbelief or persistent disobedience. Salvation is secure only for those who persevere in faith.

2. Conditional Security

- **Warnings in the NT:** The NT is full of warnings to believers against falling away. Witherington shows that these are real warnings, not hypothetical, and that final salvation requires ongoing faith and obedience.
- **Grace and Human Response:** God's grace is resistible, both at the point of conversion and afterwards. Human response is necessary, and God's sovereignty is not exercised in a way that overrides human freedom and responsibility.

3. The Nature of Atonement

- **Universal Scope:** Witherington rejects the Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement, arguing that Christ died for all, and that God desires all to be saved. The limitation is not in God's will or provision, but in human response.

In summary, the book reveals a consistent call for Evangelical theology to be continually re-examined and reformed in light of careful, contextually sensitive, narrative-driven exegesis of Scripture. Witherington challenges the distinctive claims of Calvinism, Dispensationalism, and even Wesleyanism where they depart from the biblical witness, advocating for a theology that is truly "always reforming" and "Scripture alone."

Testimony #26: Ehrman – Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why (2005)

The Author: **Bart D. Ehrman** is an American New Testament scholar whose research focuses on the textual criticism of the New Testament, the historical Jesus, and the origins and development of early Christianity. He is James A. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author or editor of more than thirty books, including six New York Times bestsellers, and he has created nine lecture series with The Great Courses. He earned a BA at Wheaton College in 1978, and an MDiv in 1981 and PhD in 1985 at Princeton Theological Seminary.[50]

The Book: " ***Misquoting Jesus***"[51] explores how the texts of the New Testament have been altered—both accidentally and intentionally—over centuries of copying by scribes. The author, Bart D. Ehrman, shares his personal journey from evangelical faith to a more critical, scholarly approach, driven by his discovery that the Bible's words have not been perfectly preserved and that the very idea of an inerrant, divinely inspired text is challenged by the manuscript evidence. Ehrman aims to make the field of textual criticism accessible to a lay audience, shedding light on how and why the New Testament text has changed and the implications for faith and history.

Core Ideas and Arguments

1. The Human Transmission of Scripture

A central argument of Ehrman's book is that the New Testament, far from being a pristinely preserved divine document, is a product of human hands, shaped by the social, theological, and historical circumstances of its transmission. In the centuries before the invention of the printing press, every copy of the New Testament was made by hand. Early copyists were often not professionals but simply literate members of

[50] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Sizer

[51] Ehrman, Bart D. *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*. HarperCollins, 2005.

Christian communities tasked with reproducing these sacred texts. This process was inherently prone to error and subject to the theological controversies of the day.

Ehrman distinguishes between accidental and intentional changes made by scribes. Accidental changes include misspellings, skipped lines, or misheard words during dictation. Intentional changes, on the other hand, were often made to harmonize discrepancies between texts, clarify or reinforce doctrine, address perceived heresies, or adapt to evolving social norms. He provides numerous examples where these changes have significant theological or doctrinal implications—such as those affecting the doctrine of the Trinity, the role of women in the church, or the nature of Jesus' divinity and humanity.

2. The Problem of the "Original Text"

Ehrman underscores that none of the original manuscripts (autographs) of the New Testament survive. All that remains are copies of copies, often produced centuries after the originals and differing from one another in thousands of places. Some of these differences are trivial, but others are substantial enough to alter the meaning of key passages. Ehrman highlights several famous examples, such as the story of the woman taken in adultery, the last twelve verses of Mark, and the so-called Johannine Comma, none of which appear in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts.

This reality leads Ehrman to question whether it is even possible to reconstruct the "original" text of the New Testament in many cases. He notes that, in some instances, the evidence is so ambiguous or the transmission so convoluted that certainty is unattainable. As a result, modern Bible translations are based on scholarly judgments that are sometimes disputed among experts.

3. The Theological and Social Context of Change

A major contribution of Ehrman's work is his exploration of the motivations behind intentional changes to the biblical text. He demonstrates that scribes were not operating in a vacuum but were deeply embedded in the theological and social debates of their time. For example, in response to adoptionist views (which held that Jesus was a mere human adopted as God's son), some scribes altered texts to more forcefully assert Jesus' divinity. In opposition to docetic views (which denied Jesus' humanity), other scribes emphasized his physical suffering and death. Similarly, as the role of women in the church became more contested, passages were sometimes modified to suppress female leadership or reinforce male authority.

Ehrman also shows how anti-Jewish sentiment and apologetic concerns in the face of pagan criticism influenced textual changes. As Christianity distanced itself from its Jewish roots and faced hostility from both Jews and pagans, scribes sometimes altered

texts to heighten Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death or to defend the faith against accusations of inconsistency or moral impropriety.

4. The Necessity and Limits of Textual Criticism

Ehrman provides a clear overview of the methods used by textual critics to reconstruct the most likely original readings. These methods involve weighing external evidence (such as the age, quality, and geographical distribution of manuscripts) and internal evidence (such as the likelihood of what an author or scribe would have written). Modern textual criticism, he explains, is a process of rational eclecticism, combining a range of evidence and reasoned judgment.

Yet, Ehrman is careful to emphasize the limits of this approach. Even the best efforts of textual critics cannot always yield certainty, and the process inevitably involves subjective judgment. The result is that even the most respected modern translations of the Bible are based on decisions that are sometimes controversial and not always supported by unanimous scholarly consensus.

5. Implications for the Doctrine of Inerrancy

The doctrine of biblical inerrancy asserts that the Bible, in its original manuscripts, is without error in all that it affirms. Ehrman's findings pose a direct and profound challenge to this doctrine.

First, the absence of the original manuscripts means that inerrancy, even if true in theory, is irrelevant in practice. No one today has access to the "original" words of scripture. What Christians have always had are copies—and those copies differ, sometimes in ways that affect doctrine and practice.

Second, the process of textual transmission was not miraculous but deeply human. Scribal changes were often motivated by theological, social, or polemical concerns. This reality undermines the idea that God not only inspired the original text but also preserved it in an inerrant form throughout history.

Third, most Christians throughout history have never had access to the "original" words. The notion that faith can be built on a perfectly preserved, inerrant text is, according to Ehrman, a historical fiction. The Bible as it exists today is a product of centuries of human transmission, with all the attendant uncertainties and ambiguities.

Ehrman's own journey reflects these implications. He describes how his study of the New Testament manuscripts led him to a "seismic change" in his understanding of scripture. No longer could he see the Bible as the inerrant word of God; instead, he came to view it as a "very human book," shaped by the needs, beliefs, and circumstances of its authors and transmitters.

6. Challenges to Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and Evangelical Literalism

a. **Dispensationalism:** Dispensationalism is a theological system that divides history into distinct periods, or "dispensations," and relies on a literal, inerrant reading of scripture to construct its framework of prophecy and doctrine. Ehrman's work undermines the textual certainty required for dispensationalist frameworks, since the very passages used to build prophetic timelines or doctrinal schemas may rest on later additions, uncertain readings, or textual variants whose original wording is in doubt.

b. **Christian Zionism:** Christian Zionism is rooted in a literal reading of biblical promises to Israel, often interpreted as prophecies about the modern state of Israel. If the biblical text is demonstrably unstable or subject to theological alteration, the certainty of these promises becomes questionable, and the theological foundation for Christian Zionism is weakened. The connection between ancient promises and contemporary politics is rendered less secure when the texts themselves are shown to be historically fluid.

c. **Evangelical Literalism:** Evangelical literalism insists that the Bible should be read as straightforwardly factual and historically accurate in all its claims. Ehrman's demonstration that even the words themselves are not always certain—and that different manuscripts present different messages—directly challenges the possibility of a consistently literal, inerrant reading. The idea that one can simply "read the Bible and know what it means" is undermined by the textual evidence of variation, ambiguity, and human intervention.

d. **Hermeneutical Implications:** All three movements share a hermeneutic of certainty: the conviction that the Bible's meaning is clear, stable, and directly accessible. Ehrman's analysis reveals that meaning is always mediated by human transmission and interpretation. The notion that one can simply read the Bible and know its meaning is challenged by the reality that the text has been shaped by centuries of copying, editing, and reinterpretation. Every act of reading is an act of interpretation, and every interpretation is shaped by the context, assumptions, and worldview of the reader.

Conclusion

Bart Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus* is both a historical investigation and a personal testimony to the complexities of the New Testament's textual tradition. His core argument—that the text of the New Testament has been altered in significant ways, and that we cannot always know what the originals said—poses a direct challenge to the doctrine of inerrancy and the hermeneutical assumptions underlying

dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and evangelical literalism. Ehrman ultimately calls for a more historically informed and humble approach to scripture, one that acknowledges its human origins, its textual uncertainties, and the necessity of critical interpretation.

By illuminating the human story behind the Bible's words, Ehrman invites readers to move beyond simplistic notions of scriptural perfection and to embrace a richer, more nuanced engagement with the texts that have shaped Western faith and culture. In doing so, he encourages both scholars and laypeople to approach the Bible not as a static oracle but as a living document, whose meaning is continually negotiated and reimagined in the ongoing conversation between past and present.

Testimony #27: Enns – Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament (2005)

The Author: **Peter Eric Enns** is an American Biblical scholar and theologian. He has written widely on hermeneutics, Christianity and science, historicity of the Bible, and Old Testament interpretation. He graduated from Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania (1982), obtained an M.Div. from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (1989), and an M.A. (1993) and Ph.D. (1994) from Harvard University (Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations). Enns returned to Westminster Theological Seminary in 1994 to begin his teaching career. He was tenured in 2000 and promoted to full professor in 2005 as a professor of Old Testament and Biblical hermeneutics.[52]

The Book: "***Inspiration and Incarnation***"[53] offers a transformative approach to understanding the nature of biblical inspiration by drawing an analogy to the incarnation of Christ—fully divine, yet fully human. Through careful engagement with issues such as ancient Near Eastern parallels, theological diversity, and the interpretive practices of New Testament writers, Enns argues that the Bible's historical and cultural embeddedness is not a problem to be explained away, but a vital aspect of its inspired character. The book challenges traditional evangelical doctrines of inerrancy and literalism, inviting readers to embrace the complexity and humanity of scripture as part of God's ongoing self-revelation, and sparking significant debate about how Christians should read and understand the Bible today.

Main Topics and Core Ideas

1. Introduction

Peter Enns' Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament is a landmark work in contemporary evangelical theology. It addresses the

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[52] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Enns

[53] Enns, Peter. *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*. Baker Academic, 2005 (Revised Edition in 2015).

deep tensions that arise when traditional doctrines of Scripture confront the findings of modern biblical scholarship, particularly regarding the Old Testament. Enns' central thesis is that an incarnational model—analogous to the Christian doctrine of Christ as both fully divine and fully human—provides a more faithful way to understand the Bible's nature than the rigid, harmonizing approaches often found in evangelicalism. This essay will outline the core arguments of Enns' book, explore its implications for the doctrine of inerrancy, and discuss the challenges it poses to the hermeneutical foundations of dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and evangelical literalism.

2. The Incarnational Analogy: A New Paradigm for Inspiration

At the heart of Enns' argument is the "incarnational analogy." Just as orthodox Christianity confesses that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human, Enns argues that the Bible is likewise both fully divine and fully human. This means that Scripture is not a "heavenly book dropped from the sky," but a collection of writings thoroughly embedded in the historical, cultural, and literary contexts of the ancient Near East. The Bible's humanity is not an embarrassment to be explained away, but an essential aspect of its very nature as revelation. God, in revealing himself, enters into the particularities of human language, thought, and culture, speaking in ways that are accessible and meaningful to the people to whom he speaks.

3. The Three Problems: Ancient Parallels, Theological Diversity, and Apostolic Hermeneutics

Enns structures his book around three major issues that have emerged from the last 150 years of biblical scholarship, each of which challenges traditional evangelical doctrines of Scripture.

a. The Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Literature

> One of the most dramatic developments in modern biblical studies has been the discovery of ancient Near Eastern texts that closely parallel the language, themes, and forms of the Old Testament. Creation stories like Enuma Elish, flood narratives like Gilgamesh and Atrahasis, legal codes such as Hammurabi's, and wisdom literature like the Instruction of Amenemope all bear striking similarities to biblical passages. These parallels have raised unsettling questions for evangelicals: If the Bible is God's unique revelation, why does it look so much like the literature of its neighbors? Does this mean the Bible is merely another ancient religious text, shaped by its environment rather than by divine inspiration?
>
> Enns responds by insisting that these similarities are not obstacles to faith but evidence of God's incarnational method of revelation. God speaks in and through the cultural conventions of the time, adopting the language, genres, and thought

forms of the ancient world to communicate his message. The Bible's "situatedness" is not a problem to be explained away but a necessary consequence of God's desire to be understood by real people in real historical circumstances. To expect the Bible to be utterly unique in form and content is to misunderstand the nature of revelation itself.

b. Theological Diversity within the Old Testament

A second major problem is the presence of theological diversity—even contradiction—within the Old Testament. Different books reflect different, sometimes opposing, perspectives on wisdom, law, history, and the nature of God. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job offer distinct and sometimes conflicting views on the relationship between righteousness and reward. The laws of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy differ in detail and emphasis. The historical narratives of Samuel–Kings and Chronicles present alternative interpretations of Israel's past, and the portrayal of God in various texts ranges from unchanging and omnipotent to responsive and even regretful.

Enns argues that this diversity is not a threat to inspiration but a sign of the Bible's genuine engagement with the complexities of human life and history. The Bible is not a flat, uniform document but a dynamic, multi-voiced witness to God's work in the world. The presence of diversity reflects the fact that God's revelation unfolds over time, in different contexts and to different communities. Rather than seeking to harmonize away these differences, Christians should learn to respect and embrace them as part of the richness of Scripture.

c. The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament

Perhaps the most challenging issue for evangelical hermeneutics is the way New Testament authors interpret the Old Testament. Again and again, they cite Old Testament texts in ways that seem to disregard their original meaning and context, employing interpretive methods that would be considered dubious by modern standards. Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1 ("Out of Egypt I called my son") to refer to Jesus' return from Egypt, Paul's argument in Galatians 3 that the Abrahamic "seed" promise refers to Christ (not "seeds," i.e., many), and the author of Hebrews' creative use of Psalm 95 are just a few examples.

Enns situates these practices within the wider context of Second Temple Judaism, where it was common to read the Scriptures in ways that sought deeper, often hidden, meanings—what he calls a "christotelic" approach. The New Testament authors, convinced by the resurrection that Jesus was the climax of God's redemptive plan, read the Old Testament as a story that finds its true meaning and fulfillment in Christ. This does not mean that every Old Testament passage is "about Jesus" in a simplistic sense, but that the whole trajectory of Scripture

points toward him. The apostles' hermeneutic is not primarily about method but about goal—the conviction that the end (telos) of the story is Christ.

4. Implications for the Doctrine of Inerrancy

Enns' incarnational model presents a significant challenge to the traditional evangelical doctrine of inerrancy, especially as it has been formulated in the wake of modernist-fundamentalist controversies. Inerrancy is often defined as the belief that the Bible is "without error" in all matters, including history and science. This doctrine, Enns argues, is shaped more by modern expectations of what a divine book should be than by the Bible's actual character.

By drawing attention to the Bible's historical and cultural embeddedness, its theological diversity, and the interpretive practices of its own authors, Enns contends that the inerrancy doctrine—if understood as requiring factual and conceptual uniformity—cannot account for the Bible as it actually exists. He does not deny the Bible's authority or reliability, but insists that doctrinal formulations about Scripture must be provisional and open to revision in light of new evidence and deeper understanding. The Bible's authority, for Enns, is grounded not in its conformity to modern standards of precision or consistency, but in its testimony to God's redemptive work in history, culminating in Christ.

5. Challenges to Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and Evangelical Literalism

a. Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism is a theological system that emphasizes a literal, historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture, especially prophecy, and maintains a strict distinction between Israel and the Church. It is also characterized by a detailed eschatological schema and a strong commitment to the inerrancy and clarity of Scripture.

Enns' work poses a direct challenge to the hermeneutical foundations of dispensationalism. First, by demonstrating that the Bible is not always "literal" in the modern sense, and that the New Testament authors often reinterpret Old Testament prophecies in light of Christ, Enns undermines the dispensational insistence on a single, consistent, literal fulfillment of prophecy. For example, the New Testament's "christotelic" readings of Old Testament texts show that the fulfillment of prophecy is often spiritual, ecclesiological, or Christological, rather than geopolitical or ethnic.

Second, Enns' emphasis on theological diversity and development within Scripture challenges the idea of a flat, univocal biblical message that can be

mapped onto a dispensational framework. The Bible's story is not one of static dispensations but of a dynamic, unfolding relationship between God and his people.

b. Christian Zionism

Christian Zionism is a movement, often rooted in dispensationalist theology, that sees the modern state of Israel as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and maintains a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church. It often interprets Old Testament land promises as having ongoing, literal significance for the Jewish people today.

Enns' christotelic approach to the Old Testament calls this assumption into question. He shows that the New Testament frequently reinterprets Israel's story and promises in spiritual or ecclesiological terms, rather than as literal, geopolitical realities. The fulfillment of God's promises to Israel is found not in a modern nation-state but in the person and work of Christ and the formation of a new people of God, composed of both Jews and Gentiles. This does not mean that the Old Testament is rendered obsolete, but that its deepest meaning is revealed in the gospel.

c. Evangelical Literalism

Evangelical literalism is the conviction that the Bible should be read "plainly," with the plain meaning equated with the original, historical sense. This approach is often seen as the surest way to safeguard the authority and clarity of Scripture.

Enns demonstrates, however, that the Bible itself—especially the New Testament's use of the Old—often does not read the Old Testament "literally" by modern standards. Ancient genres, cultural context, and the interpretive practices of the biblical authors themselves require a more nuanced, flexible approach. The "literal" reading is not always the right or only faithful way to read Scripture, and insisting otherwise leads to misreadings and unnecessary conflicts with scholarship and experience.

Instead, Enns calls for a hermeneutic that is both historically informed and Christ-centered, one that respects the diversity and complexity of the biblical text while seeking its fulfillment in Christ. This approach does not abandon the authority of Scripture but seeks to honor it by reading it on its own terms.

Conclusion

Peter Enns' Inspiration and Incarnation is a courageous and constructive contribution to evangelical theology. By insisting on the full humanity of Scripture, Enns invites evangelicals to embrace the complexity, diversity, and historical particularity of the

Bible as features, not flaws, of God's self-revelation. His incarnational model requires a rethinking of the doctrine of inerrancy and challenges the hermeneutical assumptions underlying dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and evangelical literalism. Rather than undermining faith, Enns' approach offers a more robust, honest, and Christ-centered way of reading the Bible—one that is faithful to both the realities of the text and the living God who speaks through it. In a time of polarization and anxiety about the future of evangelicalism, Enns' call for humility, openness, and theological courage is both timely and necessary.

Testimony #28: Sizer – Zion's Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel and the Church (2007)

The Author: **Stephen Sizer** (born 27 July 1953) is a British Anglican priest, theologian, and author recognized for his scholarship on Christian Zionism and its impact on church, theology, and Middle Eastern politics. He served for many years as the vicar of Christ Church, Virginia Water, in Surrey, England. Sizer holds advanced degrees in theology, including a doctorate from Oak Hill Theological College and Middlesex University.[54]

The Book: "***Zion's Christian Soldiers?***"[55] critically examines Christian Zionism—a movement within evangelical Christianity that interprets the Bible as mandating unwavering support for the modern State of Israel. Sizer challenges the theological and political assumptions underpinning this movement, arguing that it is based on a misreading of Scripture and has significant consequences for Christian witness, interfaith relations, and the Middle East peace process. The book provides a Christ-centered, biblically grounded alternative, emphasizing the inclusive and spiritual nature of God's people and kingdom.

Topics and Core Ideas

1. Christian Zionism: Definition, Origins, and Influence

Christian Zionism is a theological and political movement, especially prominent among American evangelicals, that interprets the Bible as mandating unwavering support for the modern State of Israel. It holds that the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel and the establishment of the State in 1948 are fulfillments of biblical prophecy and precursors to the Second Coming of Christ. This movement has grown in influence, shaping not only religious beliefs but also US foreign policy and attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sizer traces its roots to 19th-century dispensationalism,

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[54] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Sizer

[55] Sizer, Stephen. *Zion's Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel and the Church*. InterVarsity Press, 2007.

popularized by figures like John Nelson Darby and Cyrus Scofield, and later by authors such as Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye. He warns that Christian Zionism often conflates biblical prophecy with contemporary political events, leading to a form of activism that can justify militarism, settlement expansion, and opposition to peace efforts in the Middle East.

2. Biblical Interpretation: Literalism vs. Contextual and Progressive Reading

A central argument in the book is over how the Bible should be interpreted, particularly prophetic and apocalyptic passages. Christian Zionists often adopt a hyper-literalist hermeneutic, insisting that all Old Testament promises regarding land, people, and temple must be fulfilled physically and nationally in the modern State of Israel. Sizer critiques this approach, pointing out its inconsistencies and the dangers of reading contemporary events into ancient texts ("newspaper exegesis"). Instead, he advocates for a contextual and progressive reading—one that takes into account genre, historical background, and the way the New Testament reinterprets and fulfills Old Testament promises in Christ. Prophecy, he argues, should be understood as fulfilled in Jesus, and the New Testament provides the lens through which Christians interpret the Old.

3. Israel and the Church: The Identity of God's People

Sizer challenges the dispensationalist notion that God has two distinct peoples: Israel (the Jews) and the Church (Christians). He demonstrates from Scripture that God's covenant community has always been defined by faith, not ethnicity. In both Old and New Testaments, inclusion among God's people was open to all who trusted in Him, regardless of their ancestry. The New Testament applies titles and privileges of Israel (e.g., "chosen people," "holy nation," "children of Abraham") to the church, which is composed of both Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus. Sizer highlights that Paul, Peter, and other apostles describe the church as the "Israel of God," and that the promises to Abraham find their fulfillment in Christ and those united to Him by faith.

4. The Promised Land: Conditional and Fulfilled in Christ

The book scrutinizes the claim that the land of Israel is an unconditional, everlasting inheritance for the Jewish people. Sizer shows that, biblically, the land promises were always conditional upon faithfulness and obedience to God, and that periods of exile were a direct result of disobedience. He demonstrates that the Old Testament itself records the fulfillment of these promises during the eras of Joshua, David, and Solomon, and that later prophets saw restoration as both spiritual and inclusive of foreigners. In the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles universalize the promise of inheritance, making it spiritual ("the meek shall inherit the earth") and available to all

who are in Christ, not tied to a specific territory. The focus shifts from a physical land to a global, eternal inheritance for God's people.

5. Jerusalem: From Exclusive Capital to Universal City

Christian Zionists view Jerusalem as the undivided, eternal capital of Israel, with exclusive Jewish sovereignty. Sizer, however, shows that both Old and New Testaments envision Jerusalem as a city for all nations, a center of faith, justice, and peace. The prophets foresaw a time when Gentiles would worship the true God in Jerusalem, and Jesus redefined the city's significance, associating it with his death and resurrection rather than nationalistic hopes. The New Testament shifts focus from an earthly Jerusalem to the "heavenly Jerusalem," the spiritual home of all believers. The book of Revelation describes the New Jerusalem as inclusive, open to people of every nation, and no longer tied to ethnic or nationalistic boundaries.

6. The Temple: From Physical Structure to Spiritual Reality

A key tenet of Christian Zionism is the expectation of a rebuilt Jewish temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, often seen as a prerequisite for the Second Coming. Sizer critiques this belief, showing that the New Testament declares the temple obsolete after Jesus' sacrificial death. Jesus himself is the true temple, and the church is now God's dwelling place, "living stones" built into a spiritual house. The push to rebuild the temple is not only theologically unnecessary but also politically explosive, threatening to ignite religious conflict. Sizer warns that advocating for renewed animal sacrifices in a future temple undermines the sufficiency and finality of Christ's atonement.

7. End Times and the Rapture: Refuting Speculative Eschatology

Sizer addresses popular end-times scenarios, such as the secret rapture, the Great Tribulation, and Armageddon, which are central to Christian Zionist teaching and widely disseminated through books like the "Left Behind" series. He demonstrates that the doctrine of a two-stage return of Christ (secret rapture followed by visible return) is a recent innovation with no solid biblical basis. The New Testament consistently describes Christ's return as personal, visible, sudden, and glorious, with no secret phase. Sizer contends that an obsession with end-times speculation breeds pessimism, fatalism, and can encourage reckless political behavior, rather than faithful, watchful Christian living focused on mission and peacemaking.

8. Theological and Practical Consequences: Justice, Peace, and the Gospel

Sizer warns that Christian Zionism distorts the gospel by promoting an exclusivist, nationalistic theology that undermines the church's mission of reconciliation and justice. It often leads to uncritical support for Israeli government policies, the marginalization of Palestinian Christians, and increased tensions between Christians, Jews, and Muslims. He calls for a return to the biblical gospel that is inclusive, peacemaking, and centered on Jesus. Christians are urged to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, seek justice, and proclaim Christ as the hope for all nations, rather than fueling conflict or supporting injustice in the name of biblical prophecy.

Final Takeaway

Sizer's work calls Christians to reject the politicized, exclusivist theology of Christian Zionism and embrace a gospel that is inclusive, peacemaking, and centered on Jesus Christ. The church is the fulfillment of God's promises, and our hope and mission are global, spiritual, and rooted in the reconciling work of Christ.

Testimony #29: Wright – Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church (2008)

The Author: **Nicholas Thomas Wright** (born 1 December 1948), known as N.T. Wright or Tom Wright, is an English New Testament scholar, Pauline theologian and Anglican bishop. He was the bishop of Durham and Lord Spiritual in the UK Parliament from 2003 to 2010. He then became research professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at St Mary's College in the University of St Andrews in Scotland until 2019, when he became a senior research fellow at Wycliffe Hall at the University of Oxford. N.T. Wright has written over seventy books.[56]

The Book: "***Scripture and the Authority of God***"[57] addresses two central questions:

- What is the ultimate Christian hope?
- What are Christians supposed to do about it in the present?

Wright argues that traditional beliefs about heaven, resurrection, and the afterlife have become muddled in both the church and wider culture. He seeks to clarify the biblical vision of hope, focusing on the bodily resurrection and the renewal of creation, and to show how this hope is meant to energize Christian mission in the world today.

Other relevant books by N.T. Wright:

i. Wright, N.T. *Scripture and the Authority of God.* HarperOne, 2011.

ii. Wright, N.T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Fortress Press, 2013.

Main Topics and Core Ideas

[56] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N._T._Wright

[57] Wright, N.T. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. HarperCollins, 2008.

A. Confusion About Hope: World and Church

1. Confusion in the Wider World

Wright observes that contemporary Western culture is marked by a profound confusion about what happens after death. This confusion is not just about the details, but about the very categories and concepts involved:

- **Diverse Beliefs:** People today hold a range of beliefs about the afterlife—from complete annihilation (death as the end), to reincarnation (returning in another form), to vague ideas about spirits or souls living on in some ethereal realm. These are often blended with sentimental notions, as seen in popular poetry or funeral practices (e.g., "Do not stand at my grave and weep… I am not there. I do not die.").
- **Ancestor Worship and Spiritualism:** In some cultures, contact with ancestors is important, and even in highly technological societies, belief in ghosts and spiritual presence persists.
- **Cultural Silence and Fascination:** In the mid-20th century, Western societies often avoided talking about death, but recent decades have seen a resurgence of interest, with death and the afterlife explored in literature, film, and public mourning rituals (e.g., Princess Diana's funeral).

2. Confusion in the Church

This cultural confusion is mirrored within the church:

- **Funeral Practices and Liturgy:** Christian funerals and hymns often reflect ideas that are more Platonic or sentimental than biblical, focusing on the soul's escape to heaven rather than bodily resurrection.
- **Theological Drift:** Many Christians and even theologians have come to see resurrection as a synonym for "life after death" or "going to heaven," rather than the biblical promise of new bodily life in God's renewed creation.
- **Impact on Mission and Ethics:** This confusion leads to a diminished view of Christian mission, ethics, and engagement with the world. If salvation is about escaping the world, then justice, beauty, and care for creation seem secondary or irrelevant.

3. The Need for Clarity

Wright insists that clarity about Christian hope is not just a matter of doctrinal tidiness. What Christians believe about death, resurrection, and the future shapes everything else—our ethics, our prayers, our worship, and our mission.

B. Early Christian Hope in Historical Context

1. Jewish and Pagan Backgrounds

- **Pagan Views:** In the Greco-Roman world, the idea of resurrection was virtually unthinkable. Pagans might believe in life after death (a shadowy existence among the dead, or the soul's immortality), but never in resurrection—a return to bodily life.
- **Jewish Views:** Some Jews (notably the Pharisees) believed in a future bodily resurrection of the righteous at the end of history, but no one expected an individual to be raised ahead of the general resurrection. The Sadducees denied resurrection altogether, while others (like Philo) held to a more Platonic view.

2. The Uniqueness of Christian Hope

- **The Resurrection of Jesus:** The early Christian claim that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead in the middle of history was unprecedented. It was not just a spiritual survival or exaltation to heaven, but a transformation of bodily existence.
- **Seven Modifications of Jewish Hope:** Wright identifies seven key ways in which early Christian resurrection belief diverged from its Jewish roots:
    i. **Unanimity:** Early Christians, despite diverse backgrounds, were united in their resurrection belief.
    ii. **Centrality:** Resurrection moved from the periphery to the center of faith.
    iii. **Transformed Nature:** The resurrection body was seen as transformed and incorruptible, not just a reanimated corpse.
    iv. **Two-Stage Resurrection:** Resurrection split into two stages—Jesus first, then others at the end.
    v. **Ethical and Missional Implications:** Belief in Jesus' resurrection led to a new sense of mission and ethical transformation in the present.
    vi. **Metaphorical Use:** Resurrection became a metaphor for baptism and new life in Christ, without losing its literal meaning.
    vii. **Messiahship:** Resurrection became closely linked to the identification of Jesus as Messiah and Lord.
- **Historical Impact:** These beliefs were not just theoretical. They empowered the earliest Christians to stand against the Roman Empire, endure

persecution, and proclaim a message that was both politically and spiritually subversive.

C. The Resurrection of Jesus

1. Historical Arguments

- **Empty Tomb and Appearances:** The resurrection narratives are early, diverse, and not easily harmonized, which suggests authenticity. The presence of women as primary witnesses, the lack of scriptural proof-texting, and the unique portrayal of Jesus' resurrected body all point to something extraordinary and unexpected.
- **Not a Legend or Hallucination:** Wright argues that neither hallucinations nor wishful thinking can explain the rise of resurrection faith. Both the empty tomb and the appearances are necessary to account for the transformation of the disciples and the birth of the church.

2. Epistemology: Knowing the Resurrection

- **Beyond History and Science:** Wright explores how resurrection challenges our ways of knowing. It is a historical event, but also a unique, unrepeatable act of God. Faith in the resurrection is not blind belief but a form of knowing that includes love, hope, and trust, engaging the whole person.
- **Worldview Shift:** Belief in the resurrection demands a shift in worldview—a new way of seeing reality, history, and God's purposes.

D. God's Future Plan: Cosmic and Personal Hope

1. Critique of Popular Alternatives

- **Evolutionary Optimism:** The myth that humanity and the world are progressing inevitably toward utopia is critiqued as unable to deal with the reality of evil, suffering, and death.
- **Platonic Dualism:** The idea that salvation is about escaping the material world for a purely spiritual existence is shown to be unbiblical. Instead, the Bible affirms the goodness of creation and promises its renewal.

2. The Biblical Vision: New Creation

- **Resurrection of the Body, Renewal of Creation:** The New Testament teaches that God will do for the whole cosmos what he did for Jesus—raise it from death, liberate it from decay, and fill it with his glory.

- **Heaven and Earth United:** The climax of biblical hope is not souls going to heaven but heaven coming to earth, resulting in the "marriage of heaven and earth" (Revelation 21–22).
- **Cosmic Christ:** Jesus is the agent and model of this new creation, holding together all things and reconciling them through his cross and resurrection.

3. Implications for the Present

- **Mission and Ethics:** The hope of new creation compels Christians to work for justice, beauty, and the transformation of society, not as a distraction from "spiritual" concerns but as intrinsic to the gospel.
- **Anticipation of the Future:** Christian life is about anticipating and embodying God's future in the present, bearing witness to the coming kingdom through acts of love, justice, and creativity.

In summary, Wright's core argument is that the Christian hope is not about escaping this world for another, but about God's renewal of creation and bodily resurrection. This hope is rooted in the resurrection of Jesus, is grounded in the biblical story, and calls Christians to active participation in God's mission of renewal, justice, and beauty here and now. The confusion and distortion of this hope—both in culture and the church—have led to a diminished vision of Christian life and mission, which Wright seeks to correct by returning to the biblical foundations.

Testimony #30: Kiracofe – Dark Crusade: Christian Zionism and US Foreign Policy (2010)

The Author: **Clifford A. Kiracofe, jr.** holds a BA, MA, and Ph.D. in Foreign Affairs from the University of Virginia. He is a former Senior Professional Staff Member of the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. He has taught international relations at Washington and Lee University and at Virginia Military Institute. He has also taught at China Foreign Affairs University (Beijing). He is a columnist for Beijing Review (Beijing) and China Focus (Beijing) and has written for Global Times (Beijing).[58]

The Book: "***Dark Crusade: Christian Zionism and US Foreign Policy***"[59] is a comprehensive analysis of Christian Zionism, tracing its historical roots, ideological development, and significant impact on US foreign policy, especially in relation to the Middle East. The book argues that Christian Zionism, particularly its dispensationalist form, has become a powerful force in American politics, influencing both the Republican and Democratic parties, and shaping US attitudes and actions regarding Israel and the broader region. Kiracofe presents Christian Zionism as a radical, pessimistic ideology that diverges from traditional American religious and diplomatic traditions, often acting as an obstacle to peace in the Middle East.

Main Topics and Core Ideas

1. Origins and Development of Christian Zionism

Imperial and Ideological Roots

- **British Imperialism:** Christian Zionism's modern origins are inseparable from nineteenth-century British imperial policy. British statesmen such as Lord Palmerston saw advantage in encouraging Jewish resettlement in Palestine, both as a means of shoring up the declining Ottoman Empire and as a way to project British influence in the region. The "restoration of the Jews" was

[58] https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/author/clifford-a-kiracofe-jr/
[59] Kiracofe, Clifford A. *Dark Crusade: Christian Zionism and U.S. Foreign Policy*. I.B. Tauris, 2009.

justified through a combination of religious sentiment and cold political calculation, using biblical prophecy as an instrument for imperial strategy.

- **Restorationism:** The idea that the Jews should return to the Holy Land was not unique to Britain, but the British state was the first to systematically promote it as part of its foreign policy. This "restorationism" was supported by both religious enthusiasts (like Ashley Cooper, later Lord Shaftesbury) and secular strategists.

Dispensationalism and the Construction of Christian Zionist Ideology

- **Theological Innovation:** Dispensationalism, which became the dominant strand of Christian Zionism, was constructed in early nineteenth-century Britain by figures such as John Nelson Darby and Edward Irving. Dispensationalism divides human history into a series of epochs ("dispensations"), viewing the modern era as the "End Times," during which the return of Jews to Palestine is a necessary prelude to the Second Coming of Christ.
- **Apocalyptic Worldview:** This theology is deeply pessimistic, expecting imminent global conflict (Armageddon) and the destruction of non-believers. It is distinct from traditional mainstream Christian interpretations, which were generally more optimistic (amillennial or postmillennial) and less literalist.

Transatlantic Migration and Americanization

- **Darby's Influence in the US:** John Nelson Darby's missionary journeys to North America (starting in 1859) laid the groundwork for the spread of dispensationalism among American Protestants. Through Bible conferences, new denominations, and annotated Bibles (notably the Scofield Reference Bible), dispensationalist ideas became entrenched in American evangelical and fundamentalist circles.
- **Institutionalization:** By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, dispensationalism was being taught in an expanding network of Bible colleges, seminaries, and churches, especially among Baptists, Pentecostals, and independent evangelical groups.

2. Christian Zionism and US Foreign Policy

Early American Engagement: A Contrast

- **Constructive Engagement:** In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, US policy in the Middle East was marked by commercial pragmatism, diplomatic engagement, and respect for cultural and religious diversity. American

missionaries focused on education and medical aid, not proselytizing or political intervention.

- **Break with Tradition:** The rise of Christian Zionism marked a radical departure from this tradition, replacing constructive engagement with an ideological, often militant, interventionism that prioritized support for Zionism and later the state of Israel.

The Israel Lobby and Political Penetration

- **Formation of the Israel Lobby: Christian** Zionists became a crucial component of the broader Israel lobby in the US, operating alongside Jewish pro-Israel groups. This coalition has exerted enormous influence over Congress and successive administrations, ensuring strong US backing for Israel and shaping public discourse on Middle East policy.
- **Bipartisan Influence:** Both Republicans and Democrats have been subject to Christian Zionist pressure. The movement is not limited to one party; its influence is felt across the political spectrum, with major presidential candidates and officeholders courting its support.

Foreign Policy Consequences

- **Militarization and Imperialism:** Christian Zionism has contributed to the militarization of US foreign policy, supporting interventionist wars (notably in Iraq) and advocating for confrontation with other Middle Eastern states such as Iran and Syria. This approach is justified through a combination of biblical prophecy and geopolitical strategy, often presented as a moral or divine imperative.
- **Obstruction of Peace:** Christian Zionist leaders and organizations have consistently lobbied against peace processes that involve territorial compromise or the creation of a Palestinian state, seeing these as contrary to God's plan for Israel.

3. Ideological Contrasts and Social Impact

Conflict with Mainstream Christianity

- **Mainline Denominations:** Most mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches reject dispensationalist theology and Christian Zionism, instead advocating for a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, often supporting a two-state solution or a shared state.
- **Religious Polarization:** The rise of Christian Zionism has contributed to deep polarization within American Christianity, as well as between American

Christians and traditional Middle Eastern Christian communities, who often view Christian Zionism as alien and even harmful to their interests.

The Rise and Organization of the Christian Right

- **Growth of a Mass Movement:** Since the 1950s, especially in the context of the Cold War, the Christian Right has grown into a powerful political force. Its rise has been fueled by anti-communism, opposition to social liberalism, and a literalist reading of the Bible.
- **Institutional Power:** The Christian Right has established a vast infrastructure of churches, schools, colleges, media outlets, and advocacy groups. It mobilizes tens of millions of voters and has become a key constituency for the Republican Party.

Societal Impact

- **Political Realignment:** The increasing influence of Christian Zionism has contributed to the realignment of American politics along religious lines, with the Republican Party becoming increasingly identified with conservative evangelical Christianity and its pro-Israel positions.
- **Obstacles to Peace and Tolerance:** The ideology's literalism and exclusivism have made it a barrier to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, as well as to pragmatic solutions to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

4. Christian Zionism and Contemporary US Policy

The Bush Administration and the Middle East

- **Pinnacle of Influence:** Under George W. Bush, Christian Zionists and neoconservative allies reached the height of their influence, shaping the administration's approach to the Middle East. The Iraq War, in particular, was justified and supported by appeals to both American strategic interests and apocalyptic biblical prophecy.
- **Preventive War Doctrine:** The Bush administration's policy of preventive war and regime change in Iraq, and the advocacy for similar actions against Iran and Syria, were heavily promoted by Christian Zionist and neoconservative networks.

Opposition to Peace Initiatives

- **Blocking Compromise:** Christian Zionist leaders such as John Hagee have actively campaigned against any peace process that would involve Israel

ceding territory or sharing Jerusalem. They argue that such actions violate biblical prophecy and would bring divine judgment on the US.

- **Legislative and Grassroots Mobilization:** These leaders and their organizations have developed sophisticated lobbying and grassroots mobilization techniques, including mass media, direct mail, and church-based political action, to pressure Congress and the White House.

Alliance with the Israeli Right and Neoconservatives

- **Strategic Partnership:** The alliance between the American Christian Right, Jewish neoconservatives, and the Israeli right has created a powerful transnational network that shapes policy debates, public opinion, and legislative outcomes in both the US and Israel.
- **Shared Ideology:** This alliance is united by a shared vision of Israel's biblical destiny, a preference for military solutions to regional problems, and a deep suspicion of international institutions and peace processes.

Table 11: Core Ideas and Trajectory of Christian Zionism

Era/Theme	Key Features	Impact on Policy/Politics
British Imperial Roots	Restorationism, use of biblical prophecy for strategic aims	Foundation of Christian Zionist ideology
Dispensationalism	Literalist, apocalyptic, pessimistic; End Times focus	Drives opposition to peace processes
Transfer to America	Spread via Darby, Scofield Bible, Bible colleges	Mass movement among evangelicals
Institutionalization	Bible schools, media, political organizations	Mobilization of millions of voters
Israel Lobby Integration	Christian Zionism as a core part of the pro-Israel lobby	Bipartisan influence in US politics
Contemporary Policy	Support for wars, opposition to territorial compromise, alliance with Israeli right/neocons	Militarization of US Middle East policy

To summarize, Christian Zionism has evolved from a tool of British imperial policy into a mass-based, deeply influential American political movement. Its literalist, apocalyptic theology, institutional power, and strategic alliances have made it a central force in shaping US foreign policy, particularly in ways that obstruct peace and promote conflict in the Middle East. The ideology's continued influence poses significant challenges to American democracy, religious pluralism, and the prospects for a just and lasting peace in the region.

Conclusion: Returning to the Heart of the Faith

1. The Consensus of the Testimonies

This volume has brought together thirty voices—scholars, theologians, pastors, and historians—who, despite their diversity of background and tradition, are united in their critical assessment of Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and Evangelical Literalism. Their testimonies, spanning nearly two centuries, form a powerful chorus that exposes the theological, historical, and ethical shortcomings of these modern movements.

The consensus is clear:

- **Dispensationalism** is a recent innovation—arising in the 19th century, shaped by sectarianism, apocalyptic fervor, and reaction to social upheaval. It is not rooted in the faith of the early Church, the Reformers, or the great ecumenical creeds. Its rigid division between Israel and the Church, its obsession with predictive prophecy, and its literalist hermeneutic have led to confusion, division, and a distortion of the gospel message.
- **Christian Zionism**, built on the foundation of Dispensationalist theology, has become a political and religious force with far-reaching consequences. It has contributed to the sacralization of modern political entities, the justification of occupation and violence, and the marginalization of Palestinian Christians and Muslims. Its reading of the Bible is selective, often ignoring the prophetic calls for justice, mercy, and humility in favor of a narrow focus on land and national destiny.
- **Evangelical Literalism**, with its insistence on the "plain sense" of Scripture and the doctrine of inerrancy, has led to an impoverished engagement with the biblical text. It has fostered a brittle, defensive faith unable to grapple with the complexities, genres, and historical development of the Bible. The result is a church often divided, anxious, and vulnerable to sensationalism and failed predictions.

The testimonies instead call for a return to the historic, Christ-centered faith—a faith that is robust, intellectually honest, and ethically engaged. They remind us that the Bible is not a codebook for predicting the future or justifying political projects, but a living witness to God's redemptive love in Jesus Christ.

2. The True Teachings of Jesus: A Call to Return

At the center of the Christian faith is Jesus of Nazareth—his life, teachings, death, and resurrection. The New Testament proclaims him as the fulfillment of all God's promises, the embodiment of Israel's hope, and the Savior of the world. In his ministry, Jesus redefined what it means to be God's people, expanding the covenant to include all who trust in him, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or status.

Jesus did not call his followers to predict the future, dominate others, or claim exclusive rights to land or blessing. Instead, he called them to:

- Love God and neighbor without distinction (Luke 10:25–37)
- Seek justice and mercy for the oppressed (Matthew 23:23)
- Be peacemakers, reconcilers, and agents of healing (Matthew 5:9)
- Forgive enemies and pray for those who persecute them (Matthew 5:44)
- Bear witness to God's kingdom—a kingdom not of this world, but breaking into it through acts of compassion, humility, and self-giving love (John 18:36; Matthew 25:31–46)

The testimonies in this book urge us to recover this radical vision. They call us to read the Bible through the lens of Jesus—his cross and resurrection, his teachings and example—not through the lens of modern political agendas or speculative prophecy.

3. The Tragedy of Gaza: A Test of Christian Faithfulness

As we write, the world is witnessing a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. The devastation, displacement, and loss of innocent life are not abstract issues—they are a direct challenge to the conscience of the global church. Theologies that justify, ignore, or explain away such suffering in the name of prophecy or political necessity are a betrayal of the gospel. The current war in Gaza is a moment of truth for Christians:

- Will we stand with the vulnerable, the displaced, and the wounded, regardless of their ethnicity or creed?
- Will we speak out against injustice, violence, and the misuse of Scripture to bless war and dispossession?
- Will we listen to the cries of Palestinian Christians—our brothers and sisters in Christ—whose voices are so often silenced by the dominant narratives of Christian Zionism?
- Will we work and pray for a just peace, rooted in the dignity and rights of all people?

The testimonies in this book make it clear: **Christian faithfulness in this hour means standing on the side of justice, mercy, and reconciliation**. It means rejecting theologies that sanctify violence or privilege one people at the expense of another. It means embodying the costly love of Jesus, who wept over Jerusalem and gave his life for all.

4. A Call to Action: Faithful Witness in a Broken World

What, then, must we do? The path forward is not easy, but it is clear:

- Repent and Reform
- Educate and Discern
- Advocate and Intercede
- Embody the Gospel

For readers seeking practical guidance and deeper engagement, the book includes two essential appendices:

a. Appendix A: Q & A on Common Objections

> This section addresses frequently raised questions and objections regarding the critiques of Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and Evangelical Literalism. Drawing on biblical scholarship, historical context, and ethical reasoning, these responses equip readers to thoughtfully engage in dialogue, confront misunderstandings, and re-examine long-held assumptions in light of Scripture's overarching themes of justice, mercy, and reconciliation. Whether you are encountering these debates for the first time or seeking to refine your understanding, Appendix A provides clear, well-referenced answers that foster thoughtful reflection and informed conversation.

b. Appendix B: Suggestions for Additional Sources

> For those wishing to study further or take action, Appendix B offers a curated list of books, articles, podcasts, documentaries, and advocacy organizations. These resources represent a range of scholarly, pastoral, and activist perspectives, enabling readers to deepen their knowledge, connect with like-minded communities, and participate in efforts toward justice and peace. Whether your interest is theological, historical, or practical, this appendix serves as a gateway to continued learning and faithful activism.

By making use of these appendices, readers can move from critique to constructive engagement—growing in understanding, equipping themselves for dialogue, and finding concrete ways to embody the gospel in their own contexts.

5. Hope for the Future: A New Vision

The final word of the gospel is not war, destruction, or endless conflict, but ***hope***—the hope of resurrection, reconciliation, and new creation. N.T. Wright reminds us that Christian hope is not about escaping this world, but about God's renewal of all things—where justice and peace embrace, and every tear is wiped away.

Let us, then, be people of hope:

- Hope that resists cynicism and despair, even in the face of war and suffering.
- Hope that acts, prays, and works for the coming of God's kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven."
- Hope that trusts in the power of the cross, the victory of the resurrection, and the promise that "the meek shall inherit the earth."

6. Final Blessing

May this book be a catalyst for repentance, renewal, and courageous witness. May it inspire a new generation of Christians to reject the false gospels of nationalism, violence, and fear, and to embrace the way of Jesus—the way of justice, mercy, and peace.

> ***> "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.***
>
> ***> And what does the Lord require of you?***
>
> ***> To act justly and to love mercy***
>
> ***> and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)***

May we, by God's grace, be found faithful.

Amen.

The Appendices

Appendix A: Q & A on Common Objections

This appendix addresses frequently raised objections to the critiques presented in this book regarding dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and evangelical literalism. These questions are drawn from common debates in theological, political, and public forums, often voiced by proponents of Christian Zionism or those influenced by evangelical narratives. The responses aim to provide balanced, evidence-based rebuttals, drawing on biblical scholarship, historical context, ethical reasoning, and contemporary data. References are included for further reading. The goal is not to dismiss differing views but to encourage thoughtful dialogue and a reexamination of assumptions in light of Scripture's overarching themes of justice, mercy, and reconciliation (Micah 6:8).

Q1: Doesn't the Bible clearly promise the land of Israel to the Jewish people forever, making Christian support for Israel a biblical mandate?

A: While the Bible does contain promises of land to Abraham and his descendants (e.g., Genesis 12:1–3, 15:18), these must be interpreted in their historical and theological context, not as an eternal, unconditional deed to modern Israel. Covenant theology, as discussed in Chapter 6, views these promises as fulfilled spiritually in Christ and extended to all believers (Romans 4:13–16; Galatians 3:28–29), emphasizing a "new covenant" (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 8) that transcends ethnic boundaries. Dispensationalist interpretations often overlook how the New Testament reorients these promises toward a global kingdom (Hebrews 11:13–16), not territorial nationalism. Moreover, biblical land ethics include conditions like justice and care for the stranger (Leviticus 19:33–34; Deuteronomy 10:18–19), which critique modern policies of displacement. Supporting Israel unconditionally can thus contradict biblical calls for equity, as seen in prophetic condemnations of oppression (Amos 2:6–7).

Q2: Isn't criticizing Christian Zionism or Israel's policies inherently anti-Semitic?

A: No, critiquing specific ideologies or policies is not equivalent to anti-Semitism, which is prejudice against Jewish people as a whole. This book condemns anti-Semitism unequivocally (as rooted in historical Christian failings, e.g., supersessionism) while distinguishing it from legitimate criticism of state actions or theological positions. Many Jewish voices, including organizations like Jewish Voice for Peace and scholars like Marc Ellis, oppose occupation policies and Christian Zionism for enabling injustice,

arguing it harms both Israelis and Palestinians.[60] The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism allows for criticism of Israel "similar to that leveled against any other country."[61] Ethically, conflating criticism with bigotry silences Palestinian narratives and ignores Jewish diversity—over 40% of American Jews under 30 view Israel's actions in Gaza critically.[62] True anti-racism requires advocating for all semitic peoples, including Palestinians, and fostering interfaith solidarity.

Q3: Christian Zionism is just about supporting God's chosen people—why frame it as harmful?

A: The concept of "chosenness" in Scripture (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:6–8) is for service and blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:3), not supremacy or exclusion. Christian Zionism often twists this into unconditional political support, ignoring Jesus's teachings that expand "chosenness" to all through faith (Romans 9–11). As Chapter 3 explores, this harms by justifying occupation and dehumanizing Palestinians, including Christians, whose communities have shrunk dramatically. Theologian Stephen Sizer argues it creates a "dual covenant" heresy, separating Jews from the gospel's universal call.[63] Harm is evident in U.S. policies (Chapter 5) that enable violations, contradicting Jesus's peacemaking (Matthew 5:9). Supporting Jewish people means advocating for security and dignity for all in the region, not endorsing ideologies that fuel conflict.

Q4: What about fulfilled prophecies, like Israel's rebirth in 1948, proving dispensationalism?

A: Claims of "fulfilled prophecy" often rely on selective, retrospective interpretations. The 1948 establishment of Israel, while historically significant, is not explicitly prophesied as a modern nation-state; texts like Ezekiel 37 (dry bones) traditionally symbolize spiritual revival, not political events. Dispensationalism's track record includes failed predictions (e.g., Hal Lindsey's 1980s rapture claims in The Late Great Planet Earth, 1970). Scholar Barbara Rossing critiques this as "prophecy abuse,"

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[60] Ellis, Marc H. *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*. Baylor University Press, 2004.
[61] International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. *Working Definition of Antisemitism*, 2016.
[62] Pew Research Center. *Jewish Americans in 2024*. https://www.pewresearch.org/search/jewish+americans+2024
[63] Sizer, Stephen. *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* InterVarsity Press, 2004.

ignoring historical context and promoting fatalism over ethical action.[64] True biblical prophecy emphasizes moral imperatives (Isaiah 1:17), not geopolitical validation. Alternative views see God's faithfulness in diverse ways, including the church's global mission.

Q5: Don't alternative theologies like liberation theology ignore the Old Testament's emphasis on Israel?

A: On the contrary, liberation theology engages the Old Testament deeply, drawing from Exodus liberation narratives and prophetic justice calls (e.g., Isaiah 61:1–2, echoed in Luke 4:18–19). It critiques selective literalism that prioritizes land over ethics, as in Chapter 6. Covenant theology integrates the Old Testament by seeing promises fulfilled in Christ (Hebrews 1:1–2), maintaining continuity without nationalism. Palestinian theologian Naim Ateek affirms: "We honor the Hebrew Scriptures by applying their justice ethic to today's oppressed, including Palestinians".[65]12 Ignoring this leads to an imbalanced hermeneutic that sidelines New Testament universality (Ephesians 2:14–16).

Q6: How can Christians practically respond if they agree with the book's critiques?

A: Start with education and prayer, then engage in advocacy: Support BDS, contact legislators for conditional aid, join groups like Sabeel or Churches for Middle East Peace, and amplify Palestinian voices. As Chapter 7 outlines, embody prophetic peace through solidarity and reconciliation efforts.[66]

Q7: Doesn't Genesis 12:3 mean that God will curse those who curse Israel, so Christians must support it to avoid divine judgment?

A: This verse ("I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse") refers to Abraham personally and his role in blessing all nations, not a blanket endorsement of modern Israel's policies. Dispensationalists often misapply it geopolitically, ignoring the New Testament's fulfillment in Christ (Galatians 3:8), where blessings come through faith, not nationalism. As Chapter 2 discusses, this creates a

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[64] Rossing, Barbara R. *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation.* Basic Books, 2004.
[65] Ateek, Naim. *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*. Orbis Books, 1989.
[66] Kairos Palestine. *A Moment of Truth*, 2009.

fear-based theology that overrides justice. Ethicist Walter Brueggemann interprets it as a call to relational blessing, not coercion: "The promise invites participation in God's shalom for all peoples".[67] True biblical obedience involves mercy and justice (Hosea 6:6), not unconditional allegiance that enables harm.

Q8: Isn't dispensationalism's focus on end-times prophecy essential for motivating evangelism and holy living?

A: While eschatology can inspire hope, dispensationalism's speculative timelines (e.g., pre-tribulation rapture) often distract from present ethical duties, as critiqued in Chapter 2. Jesus emphasized readiness through love and justice (Matthew 24:42–51; 25:31–46), not date-setting or geopolitical fixation. Scholar N.T. Wright argues that apocalyptic texts like Revelation symbolize resistance to empire, urging active faithfulness now.[68] Alternatives like amillennialism promote evangelism through embodying God's kingdom today, avoiding the fatalism that can lead to apathy toward injustice.

Q9: How do Palestinian Christians themselves view Christian Zionism, and isn't their perspective biased?

A: Many Palestinian Christians, such as those in the Kairos Palestine movement, strongly oppose Christian Zionism for erasing their 2,000-year presence and justifying occupation. Figures like Mitri Raheb and Munther Isaac describe it as a foreign imposition that ignores indigenous theology.[69] Their views are informed by lived experience, not bias, and align with global ecumenical bodies like the World Council of Churches.20 Dismissing them overlooks Jesus's solidarity with the marginalized (Luke 4:18–19) and the church's diversity.

Q10: If Christian Zionism is so flawed, why does it have such widespread support among evangelicals?

A: Its popularity stems from historical factors like Scofield's Reference Bible (1909), media influence (e.g., Left Behind series), and political alliances (Chapter 5). Surveys show declining support among younger evangelicals, with many prioritizing

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[67] Brueggemann, Walter. *Theology of the Old Testament*. Fortress Press, 2003.
[68] Wright, N.T. *Revelation for Everyone*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.
[69] Raheb, Mitri. *Faith in the Face of Empire*. Orbis Books, 2014.

justice. Widespread doesn't mean correct—historical examples include slavery's theological defenses. Education and exposure to alternatives, as advocated in Chapter 7, can shift perspectives toward a more prophetic faith.

Appendix B: Suggestions for Additional Sources

To deepen your understanding of the themes explored in this book—Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, Evangelical Literalism, and the quest for a more authentic, justice-oriented Christian faith—we recommend the following books, articles, and media. These resources represent a range of scholarly, pastoral, and activist perspectives, and are invaluable for further study, reflection, and action.

1. Books on Dispensationalism and Its Critique

- "*Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?*" by William E. Cox
  A classic critique of dispensationalist theology from a Reformed perspective.

- "*The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*" by Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock
  An exposition of a more nuanced form of dispensationalism, useful for understanding internal debates.

- "*The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options*" by Stanley J. Grenz
  A clear overview of various millennial views within evangelicalism.

- "*End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology*" by Gary DeMar
  A direct response to popular dispensationalist fiction and its theological assumptions.

2. Books on Christian Zionism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

- "*Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism*" by Stephen Spector
  A historical account of the rise and influence of Christian Zionism in the United States.

- "*Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians*" by Gary M. Burge
  A theological and historical exploration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a Christian perspective.

- "*Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Crisis Over Israel and Palestine*" by Colin chapman
  A balanced biblical and historical overview.

- "*Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*" by Naim Stifan Ateek
  A foundational work in Palestinian liberation theology.

3. Books on Biblical Interpretation and Hermeneutics

- "*The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It*" by Peter Enns
  A call for a more honest and nuanced approach to Scripture.

- "*Reading the Bible with the Damned*" by Bob Ekblad
  An account of reading Scripture with marginalized communities, challenging literalist approaches.

- "*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*" by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart
  A practical guide to interpreting different genres and contexts in the Bible.

4. Documentaries and Multimedia

- "With God on Our Side" (DVD/Streaming)
  A documentary examining the impact of Christian Zionism on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- "The Stones Cry Out" (Documentary)
  Stories of Palestinian Christians and their struggle to maintain their presence and witness in the Holy Land.

5. Podcasts

Podcasts offer engaging, conversational formats for learning about these topics. Episodes often feature interviews with theologians, activists, and historians.

- **The Holy Post** (hosted by Phil Vischer and Skye Jethani): Episodes like "Christian Zionism & the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" (2023–2025 series) critique evangelical support for Israel. Available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or holyPost.com. https://www.holypost.com/
- **The Bible for Normal People** (hosted by Pete Enns and Jared Byas): Features discussions on dispensationalism and alternative theologies, e.g., Episode

250: "Decolonizing the Bible" with Mitri Raheb (2024). Access via: https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/

- **Can I Say This At Church?** (hosted by Seth Price): Episodes critiquing end-times theology and Zionism, e.g., interview with Barbara Rossing (2024). Available on: https://www.canisaythisatchurch.com/
- **Stephen Sizer:** Stephen is the founder and director of Peacemaker Trust, a registered charity dedicated to peacemaking, especially where minorities are persecuted, where justice is denied, human rights are suppressed or reconciliation is needed. His website contains several podcasts that critique Christian Zionism and call for just peace in the Middle East. https://stephensizer.com/podcast/

6. Advocacy and Peace Organizations

These groups focus on education, advocacy, and reconciliation. Many offer newsletters, events, and volunteer opportunities.

- **Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center** (Jerusalem-based): Promotes Palestinian Christian theology and nonviolent resistance. Join their "Friends of Sabeel" chapters worldwide. Website: https://sabeel.org/
- **Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP):** A coalition of U.S. denominations advocating for balanced policies. Provides advocacy toolkits. Website: https://cmep.org/
- **Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP):** Jewish-led group opposing occupation and supporting BDS. Resources include webinars on anti-Zionism. Website: https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/
- **Parents Circle-Families Forum:** Unites bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families for reconciliation. Offers storytelling workshops. Website: https://www.theparentscircle.org/
- **Kairos USA:** U.S. response to the Kairos Palestine document, focusing on church activism. Website: https://kairosusa.org/
- **Breaking the Silence:** Israeli veterans sharing testimonies about occupation. Educational resources for global audiences. Website: https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/?tztc=1
- **IfNotNow:** Progressive Jewish movement against occupation, with educational campaigns. Website: https://www.ifnotnowmovement.org/
- **Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC):** UK-based advocacy for Palestinian rights, with global partnerships. Website: https://palestinecampaign.org/

- **World Council of Churches (WCC):** Ecumenical body with programs on Middle East peace and justice. Website: oikoumene.org (search for Palestine initiatives).
- **Amnesty International:** Reports on human rights in Israel-Palestine, with advocacy actions. Website: amnesty.org (Middle East section).

These sources are offered to encourage deeper study, honest questioning, and faithful action. May your journey into these materials lead to greater understanding, compassion, and commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Glossary

This glossary provides definitions and context for key terms, movements, and theological concepts discussed throughout the book. It is designed to help readers navigate the complex landscape of Christian theology, biblical interpretation, and the contemporary issues related to Israel, Palestine, and the Church.

A

Aliyah: Hebrew term meaning "ascent," referring to the immigration of Jews to Israel/Palestine. In Zionist contexts, it often denotes waves of Jewish migration, such as those encouraged by the State of Israel since 1948, mostly at the expense of Palestinian land rights.

Amillennialism: A Christian eschatological view that interprets the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 symbolically, believing that Christ’s reign is currently being fulfilled through the Church and will culminate in his second coming. Amillennialists reject the idea of a literal, future thousand-year reign of Christ on earth.

Apostolic Faith: The faith taught by the apostles and preserved in the early church, often contrasted with later doctrinal innovations.

B

Biblical Literalism: The approach to interpreting the Bible that insists its words should be understood in their most plain, straightforward, and literal sense, often with minimal regard for literary genre, historical context, or symbolism.

Biblical Criticism: The scholarly study and analysis of biblical texts, focusing on their origins, composition, historical context, and literary features. Includes textual criticism, source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism.

C

Canon: The official list of books recognized as Holy Scripture by a religious community.

Christian Zionism: A movement among some Christians, especially evangelicals, that supports the modern state of Israel as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy and often advocates for political support of Israel based on theological convictions.

Chosen People: A biblical concept (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:6–8) referring to Israel's election by God for a purpose of blessing all nations (Genesis 12:3). In Christian theology, this is often reinterpreted through Christ to include all believers, countering exclusivist uses in Christian Zionism.

Covenant Theology: A framework for understanding the Bible that emphasizes God's unfolding covenants with humanity (e.g., with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Christ), viewing the Church as the continuation and fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.

Creeds: Formal statements of Christian belief, such as the Nicene Creed or Apostles' Creed, expressing core doctrines of the faith.

Cruciform: Literally "cross-shaped"; used to describe theology, spirituality, or ethics that are centered on the self-giving love and sacrificial example of Jesus on the cross.

D

Dispensationalism: A system of biblical interpretation developed in the 19th century that divides history into distinct periods ("dispensations") in which God relates to humanity in different ways. Dispensationalists typically distinguish sharply between Israel and the Church and advocate for a literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in modern Israel.

Dual Covenant Theology: The belief that God has separate covenants with Israel and the Church, sometimes suggesting that Jews are saved by adherence to the Mosaic covenant while Christians are saved through Christ. This view is controversial and rejected by most mainstream Christian traditions.

E

Eschatology: The branch of theology concerned with "last things"—death, judgment, heaven, hell, and the ultimate destiny of humanity and creation. Includes beliefs about the second coming of Christ, the resurrection, and the final judgment.

Ethnic Cleansing: The forced removal of an ethnic or religious group from a territory through violence, intimidation, or policy. Historian Ilan Pappé applies this to the 1948 Nakba, where approximately 750,000 Palestinians were displaced during Israel's founding.

Evangelicalism: A trans-denominational Christian movement emphasizing the authority of Scripture, the necessity of personal conversion, the centrality of Christ's atoning death, and the importance of evangelism.

F

Fundamentalism: A movement within Protestantism that emerged in the early 20th century, advocating strict adherence to certain "fundamental" doctrines (such as

biblical inerrancy, the virgin birth, and the bodily resurrection of Jesus) and often characterized by resistance to modern biblical scholarship.

H

Hermeneutics: The theory and practice of interpretation, especially of biblical texts. Hermeneutics involves understanding genre, context, language, and the intended meaning of Scripture.

Historic Premillennialism: An eschatological view that expects Christ's return to precede a literal thousand-year reign on earth, but does not share the dispensationalist division between Israel and the Church.

I

Inerrancy: The doctrine that the Bible, in its original manuscripts, is without error in all its teachings, including matters of history and science as well as faith and practice.

Israel (Biblical): Originally the name given to the descendants of Jacob (Israel), later referring to the nation and people to whom God's promises were given in the Old Testament.

Israel (Modern State): The nation-state established in 1948 in the Middle East, commonly identified as the fulfillment of various biblical prophecies by Christian Zionists.

J

Just War Theory: A Christian ethical framework for evaluating the morality of war, emphasizing criteria such as legitimate authority, just cause, right intention, proportionality, and last resort.

L

Literalism (Biblical): See **Biblical Literalism**.

Liberation Theology: A movement originating in Latin America and among Palestinian Christians, emphasizing God's preferential option for the poor and oppressed and the call to social justice.

M

Millennialism: Beliefs about the "millennium," or thousand-year reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation 20. Views include premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism.

Messianic Judaism: A movement of Jews who believe Jesus is the Messiah but retain Jewish identity and practice, often aligning with evangelical theology.

O

Occupation (Israeli-Palestinian Context): Refers to Israel's military and administrative control over territories such as the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza since 1967, widely regarded as illegal under international law.

P

Palestinian Christians: Christians whose ancestral roots trace to Palestine, including the Holy Land. They are often marginalized in Western Christian narratives about Israel and prophecy.

Premillennialism: The belief that Christ will return before (pre-) a literal thousand-year reign on earth.

Preterism: An interpretive approach to prophecy that holds many biblical predictions were fulfilled in the first century, especially in events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Prophecy (Biblical): Messages delivered by God's messengers (prophets), often calling for repentance, justice, and hope, and sometimes foretelling future events.

R

Rapture: A belief, especially among dispensationalists, that Christians will be taken up ("raptured") from the earth prior to a period of tribulation and the second coming of Christ.

Replacement Theology (Supersessionism): The view that the Church has replaced Israel as the people of God. While often criticized, many theologians prefer to speak of "fulfillment" rather than "replacement."

S

Supersessionism: See **Replacement Theology**.

Second Coming: The anticipated return of Jesus Christ to earth, bringing final judgment and the fulfillment of God's kingdom.

T

Textual Criticism: The scholarly discipline of studying ancient manuscripts to determine the most reliable text of the Bible.

Tribulation: A period of suffering and turmoil described in apocalyptic literature, especially in dispensationalist eschatology.

Z

Zionism: A political movement advocating for the establishment and support of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Christian Zionism applies theological significance to this movement.

This glossary is intended as a reference to clarify terminology and concepts as you engage with the book's testimonies and arguments. For further detail and nuance, consult the recommended sources in Appendix B.

Bibliography and References

This bibliography compiles the key sources referenced throughout the book in addition to other relevant sources. It serves as a comprehensive reference list for readers seeking to verify claims, explore primary sources, or delve deeper into the topics discussed. Sources are organized alphabetically by author's last name.

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About the Author

Dr. Mohammad Mahmoud Mandurah

- Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering, Stanford University.
- A Retired University Professor.
- Resides in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
- Email: mmandurah@yahoo.com

Other books by the author in the field of “Religion”:

- *25 Testimonies Against the Bible (2020).*
- *Biblical Creation vs. Qur’anic Creation (2020).*
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